

The Management of “Nonrelational Sexuality”

Positioning Strategies in Adolescent Male Talk about (Hetero)Sexual Attraction

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This article uses a discursive psychological approach in examining how three different age groups of young adolescent boys (ages 10-15) construct and then manage various forms of “nonrelational sexuality” in focus group conversations. Rather than seeing nonrelational sexuality as something that is successfully or unsuccessfully “resolved” during the course of development, nonrelational sexuality will be seen as a fluid and socially constructed resource that is variously used by young men as a way to account for their masculine identities. The analysis will particularly focus on the safeguarding strategies that each age group of young men actively uses to both anticipate and counter the potential “trouble” of nonrelational sexuality and, in so doing, how they indirectly keep forms of nonrelational sexuality alive without directly appearing serious or misogynistic about it. The analysis will demonstrate how nonrelational forms of sexuality, like most instantiations of hegemonic masculinity, are notoriously elusive in resisting “fixity.”

Key words: nonrelational sexuality; discourse; masculinity; heterosexuality; adolescence; prejudice; positioning; gender identity

Within critical approaches to male sexuality, one of the more widely discussed problems or psychosocial stages that young men are thought to begin to transition through is *nonrelational sexuality* (or NS)—a constellation of “attitudes” and “behaviors” characterized by an experience of sexuality as sport or as lust, an obsession with physical attraction, an objectification of sexual partners, as well as tendencies toward trophyism, voyeurism, and hypersexuality (Brooks 1997; Good and Sherrod 1997; Johnston 1997; Levant 1997). According to Good and Sherrod (1997), NS is a developmental lifestage that most men enter during adolescence and some successfully begin to resolve. The notion, however, of what it means to “pass through” or “successfully resolve” NS remains an open and relatively unexplored (at least empirically) question. Much of the work on young men’s negotiation of NS is derived from clinical observation, theory, and speculation (Good and

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Sherrod 1997). What is conspicuously absent are in-depth, contextually sensitive explorations that address how young men actually comply with and resist (or try to “resolve”) aspects of NS throughout time and in particular sociocultural contexts, and what that conformity and resistance look like from their own perspectives and in their own words. What is needed is research that explores the multifaceted, dilemmatic, and often contradictory ways that young men actively manage and negotiate NS during the course of their adolescent development.

Exploring how adolescent males negotiate NS means appreciating that processes of gender-identity formation have a curious negotiability to them in the sense that cultural constructions of gender are often contradictory and inconsistent (Connell 1995). Connell (1995, 77) has stressed that hegemonic forms of masculinity (like NS) are “historically mobile relations” with a formidable resourcefulness to them. In other words, the stability of NS may very well lie in its flexibility to accommodate ostensibly incongruous values or norms. In their everyday talk, young men may *not* orient to forms of NS in the kind of straightforward way that they are asked about it on psychological scales and inventories. Rather, young men may “mix” forms of nonrelational sexuality with more egalitarian or intimate/relational forms of sexuality (Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman 2002; Gough 2001).

During the course of adolescence, young men may become increasingly adept at inoculating against the appearance of prejudice (Korobov 2004; Korobov and Bamberg 2004). They may knowingly or unknowingly engage in “compensatory activities” (Sargent 2000) that remain indirectly complicit with sexism or heterosexism (Phua 2002; Wetherell and Edley 1999). These activities may be as deliberate as co-opting feminist practices (Pease 2002) or engaging in the “repertoires of romance” (Redman 2001). Or, more commonly, they may involve the simple but strategic use of disclaimers, irony, humor, or playing dumb. These strategies allow the boys to display an ironic knowingness or tongue-in-cheek quality about their own NS, which preserves the quality of deniability if criticized. These ways of maneuvering and safeguarding are largely unexamined by social scientists but are highly important as gendered, developmental accomplishments. They allow young men to indirectly keep forms of NS alive without directly appearing serious or misogynistic about it. Seen as such, straightforwardly identifying the successful or unsuccessful resolution of NS as it occurs in the everyday talk of young men may be a difficult, if not impossible, endeavor.

NONRELATIONAL SEXUALITY FROM A DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of examining the everyday interactive talk of adolescent males is to reveal how forms of NS are worked up, managed and negotiated

(rather than resolved), and made to appear natural, inevitable, or ordinary as part of the ongoing development of their heteronormative masculine identities. The aim of this study is to use a discursive psychological approach (Bamberg 2004; Edwards and Potter 1992; Korobov 2001; Potter and Wetherell 1987) to examine the highly subtle and context-sensitive ways that three distinct age groups of adolescent young men (ten, twelve, and fifteen year olds) manage forms of NS while discussing sexual attraction to girls and the importance of physical appearance in focus group interaction.

Discursive psychology (DP) is a constructionist approach that applies ideas from discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and ethnomethodology to psychological issues and concepts (Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter and Wetherell 1987). Discursive psychology is concerned with identifying the rhetorical and argumentative organization of discourse. As an analytic project, it focuses largely on the co-construction of conversational accounts, particularly on the way in which those accounts are formed and with how they are attended to by other speakers. Accounts are often constructed in ways that index ideological dilemmas (for example, how a heterosexual adolescent boy might try to talk about "being attracted to a girl" without seeming either misogynistic or too bashful about it). Discursive psychology is useful for examining the ways that these types of dilemmas are managed—that is, how young men's accounts about nonrelational forms of sexuality are designed to counter actual or imagined challenges while at the same time securing a stake in heteronormative masculinity. By interrogating the rhetorical design of interactive talk, a discursive approach reveals the formative processes involved in the production and development of nonrelational forms of gender identity. It reveals what managing forms of NS means for the adolescent boys themselves, in their own language, and from their own perspectives.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Participants and Procedure

The data presented here come from the first phase of a five-year longitudinal and cross-sectional study investigating adolescent boys' (ages 10-15) discourse and identity development (Bamberg 2004). Within the first phase, more than three hundred hours of talk were audio- and video-recorded from fifty-four boys. All fifty-four of the participants were from working-class families, all were of mixed ethnicities, and all attended public elementary and middle schools in a large metropolitan New England city. The boys were divided into three separate age groups (ten, twelve, and fifteen year olds). Each boy participated in four diverse discourse settings: (1) free-interactive or "naturalistic," data (collected during an ethnographic study of lunchtime,

recess, and hanging out in various after school activities); (2) private journal writing; (3) open-ended interviews; and (4) adult-guided focus groups. The ethnographic data from the free-interactive sessions were examined to ascertain what the boys talked most about. The salient topics were used to loosely initiate and guide talk in the interviews and focus groups.

The current study specifically examines a total of ten stretches of focus group data with three to four excerpts from each of the three age groups. Each of the focus groups contained between four and six boys, lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours, was videotaped, and was moderated by an adult male. The boys were told that the purpose of the focus groups was to generate some group discussion about what it means to them to be growing up as young men. Although the focus groups are adult moderated, the style and texture of the talk are largely the participants' own creation. Each of the three age groups chose what aspects of NS to focus on, how to respond to the moderator's queries, and how to frame their positions in ways that were relevant for them. As such, the focus groups proved to be highly useful as developmentally rich sites for seeing the generation and maintenance of social practices from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Morgan 1997; Wilkinson 1998). In each of the focus group excerpts presented below, NS is made relevant as each of the groups of boys (at some point in the focus group) addresses the topic of being attracted to girls and the importance of physical appearance or "looks" in terms of sexual attraction (cf. Kehily 2001).

Positioning and Positioning Analysis

There are many forms of discursive analysis, each of which is a craft skill and thus not easily translated into a concrete recipe. Drawing on a blend of techniques from conversation analysis and discursive social psychology (see Edwards and Potter 1992; Potter and Wetherell 1987), the current study uses the notion of *positioning* and *positioning analysis* (Bamberg 1997, 2004; Korobov 2001; Korobov and Bamberg 2004). The present analyses will examine *positioning strategies*, which refer to the ways that speakers use language to frame or situate themselves and others in talk against a backdrop of referential entities (places, people, selves, events, and so on). It specifically scrutinizes the interlocutors' *conversational positions*, positions that can be easily amended, modified, or abandoned in dealing with the argumentative nature of discourse. The notion of positioning conceptualizes boys as agents who interactively (although not necessarily consciously or intentionally) draw up conversational positions that index certain cultural/social perspectives on masculinity, perspectives that are often dilemmatic and thus in constant need of careful management.

Analyzing conversational identity positions stands as a replacement for the notion of measuring attitudes, roles, or social norms. Identity positions

are immanent within conversations and constituted through language use, whereas attitudes, roles, and norms are usually taken to have an independent, nondiscursive structure that is either "behind" the language used or "out there" in culture. Because forms of NS are conceptualized here as social and interactive phenomena, what is needed is a commensurate analytic focus that appreciates the formative ways in which forms of NS are interpreted from the perspectives of the participants themselves. Analyzing the ebb and flow of conversational positioning allows one to take seriously the "under construction" social/interactive aspect of such identity work. This allows for a more microgenetic analysis of emergent identities within social interaction (Korobov and Bamberg 2004). The aim with this style of analysis is to examine how each of the three age groups of boys incrementally moves back and forth between different masculine identity positions while negotiating what nonrelational forms of sexuality mean to them. Of particular interest is how (and to what extent) the different age groups recognize the potential "trouble" that lurks in talk about nonrelational forms of sexuality, and how they attempt to either ignore it or manage and safeguard their masculine identities while positioning themselves with regard to it.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

The extracts and analysis are sequentially arranged by age group. Three excerpts from the ten year olds will be presented first, then three excerpts from the twelve year olds, and finally four excerpts from the fifteen year olds. Each of the excerpts lasts anywhere from forty-five seconds to two minutes and was audio- and videotaped. The main reason for examining relatively small stretches of focus group data is to provide sufficient specificity and analytic detail of the formative processes involved in negotiating and managing salient aspect of NS. Within a discursive paradigm, the goals of analytic rigor, in-depth rendering of the participant's own orientations, context specificity, and particularization are key evaluative criteria (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Patton 2002).

As noted above, each of the excerpts is a selected case in which stereotypical aspects of NS (like physical attraction, the importance of "good looks," and sexual relations) are brought up and managed. The boys draw on their own experiences, views, personal knowledge, and stories to give meaning to NS. Unlike Patton's (2002) recommendation that qualitative researchers select cases at the extremes of a distribution to offer rich and vivid information, the excerpts here are mundane and common in that they represent fairly typical and often repeated strategies for managing NS. Attention will be given to how positions and rhetorical moves are created, maintained, and sometimes abandoned in the doing of NS. As such, the analysis is not a coding procedure for summarizing broad themes or categories. Rather, it is a

microgenetic analysis of the emergent subject positions within the argumentative and rhetorical texture of the interaction.

Analysis of Ten Year Olds

Although the ten year olds definitely orient to the importance of good looks and sexual conquest, they did so with a minimal amount of indirect safeguarding strategies for managing norms against seeming too complicit with NS. Nor did they vigorously orient to the potential trouble in the moderator's occasional soft challenges. What they did was display a prototypical type of "embarrassment" about being into looks or about being physically attracted to girls (Bamberg 2004; Korobov and Bamberg 2004; Frosh et al. 2002). One could argue that doing embarrassment is a way of displaying that there is something at stake (or potentially threatening) about *openly* orienting to forms of NS. The embarrassment softens extreme affinity with NS by displaying hesitancy. The embarrassment is, however, rather obvious and conspicuous. Consider the following excerpt in which Vin attempts a rather clandestine confession about his own feelings of attraction by awkwardly trying to whisper in Walt's ear what his friend likes about girls' looks.

Excerpt 1^a

Participants: M: Moderator, V: Vin, Mi: Mark, B: Brad, W: Walt

-
- 1 M: so what what guys (.) what is it that sticks out that you like in girls (.)
 2 is it the cute face=
 3 V: =I remember=
 4 M: =is it the personality=
 5 V: =I remember once (.) I knew it (1.0) oh I can't tell it though
 6 B: COME ONE
 7 V: I promised my friend I wouldn't
 8 M: okay then (.) we won't cause a promise=
 9 V: =but I don't care
 10 B: is he at this ↑ school
 11 V: no (.) cause that's why (.) he's not at this school so you guys won't know about it
 12 M: okay
 13 V: that's why
 14 M: well (.) you don't need to mention any names
 15 B: yeah just don't say the names
 16 W: don't say the name (.) just say=
 17 M: =well what is it about (.) what is it=
 18 V: =it's about what this (.) what my FRIEND likes about a girl
 19 M: and is that what YOU also think boys really like about ↑ a girl
 20 B: SAY IT
 21 V: no it's what HE likes about a girl
 22 B: SAY IT
 23 M: what is different then from what he says from what you think in general boys=
 24 V: =can I have somebody say it for me (.) cause I don't want to say it
 25 W: alright yeah ((leans in to allow Vin to whisper it to him)) I'll say it ((Vin gets up,

- 26 looks around and then whispers into Walt's ear. Walt then laughs))
 27 Mi: SAY IT
 28 W: there's this cute girl who lives on his street and ((makes scare-quotes
 29 sign)) HIS FRIEND said that (.) said that he looked at her legs when she was
 30 wearing a dress and he said WHOAA (.) even though I think it was YOU ((points
 31 at Vin))
 32 V: ((shakes head 'no', but smiling)) it wasn't me=
 33 M: =never (.) Vin wouldn't do THAT ((laughing)) [So legs (.) good looking legs
 34 V: [It wasn't me hey I'm Shaggy
 35 (.) it wasn't me ((all laugh))

a. See appendix for transcript conventions.

There are two relevant ways that Vin attempts to manage NS in this excerpt. The first is through displaced agency (Vin claims to be talking about what his friend thinks, not what he thinks) and the second is through the secretive whispering and giggling about it. Vin initially orients to the potential trouble (line 5: "oh I can't tell it though") in talking openly about girls' looks. He begins by displacing the evaluative comments about girls onto his friend ("I promised my friend I wouldn't"), but then in the next turn concedes that he does not care about protecting the secret. The concession ("but I don't care") is rather curt but for good reason. It allows Vin to get to the point of talking about it, which Brad in particular constantly urges him to do. He is able to do this because he has already insulated himself from reproach because he claims to be only conveying what his friend said, not what he thinks. But, in lines 19 and 23, the moderator prompts Vin to personally take a position on what his friend thinks.

These prompts occasion the second form of mitigation. Rather than simply saying it out loud (which is itself a form of "owning" the evaluation), Vin whispers what his friend said into Walt's ear, leaving Walt to then repeat to the group. The whispering is yet another way of orienting to the potential trouble in displays of NS. The exchange is marked with overt displays of secretive gesturing and nervous laughter (lines 25-26). After the admission, Walt immediately (line 30) calls Vin's bluff and suggests that Vin's "friend" is really a stand-in for Vin himself. Vin's laughter, the moderator's subsequent sarcasm (line 33: "Vin wouldn't do THAT"), and Vin's weak protests (32) orient to the obvious and facile nature of Vin's displacement strategy. This particular way of negotiating NS is rather obvious and deliberate. Although the displaced agency and whispering do orient to the potential trouble about being openly committed to forms of NS, they are not robust rhetorical strategies for securing a believable deniability if challenged.

Consider the following exchange in which the boys are talking about what their lives will be like ten years from now (at age twenty). Walt works up a promiscuous position about having thirty girlfriends, only to then resort to extreme case softeners to downplay the "trouble" signaled by the moderator's half-serious, ironic challenges.

Excerpt 2

Participants: M: Moderator, V: Vin, Mi: Mark, B: Brad, W: Walt

-
- 1 M: do you guys want to go to ↑college
 2 B: yeah I wanna be a lawyer
 3 M: when you are twenty (.) do you think you'll have a girlfriend
 4 B: OH YEAH OH::: YEAH
 5 W: I'm gonna have like THIRTY girlfriends
 6 M: [no::
 7 V: [you be like a playa'
 8 M: Walt (.) what do you wanna do with THIRTY girlfriends
 9 W: I'll go to her house (.) and then to hers=
 10 V: =one for each night=
 11 W: =and then I'll go to her house (.) and then I'll go to her house (.) ONE
 12 FOR EVERY NIGHT (.) and then after the thirtieth night (.) I'll go back
 13 to the first one ((laughter, 1.0))
 14 M: [come on
 15 V: [one for every night of the month
 16 M: so then what do you do in a month with thirty-ONE days
 17 V: one for every night of the month
 18 W: then I'll go spend the time with my friends
 19 [...]
 20 M: so Walt (.) when you are twenty and you have thirty girlfriends (.)
 21 will they each be giving you ↑ a baby
 22 W: NO:::
 23 B: ((to Moderator)) are they what
 24 M: well (.) I want to find out whether he's gonna be a father of thirty kids
 25 W: no::: I'm not gonna (.) UGGH NO (.) I'm not gonna have (.)
 26 ↓°uh ((spelling it out)) S-E-X° with ↑ ANY of them
-

Of relevance in this excerpt is Walt's orientation to extreme promiscuity, or the NS feature of hypersexuality (Brooks 1997). The claim to have thirty girlfriends is hearable as extreme, but its extremism is not treated as problematic or inappropriate by the other boys. Rather, Vin celebrates such prowess, calling Walt a "playa" (line 7), then colludes three consecutive times with Walt in exclaiming that he will have one girl for each night of the month (lines 10, 15, and 17). The moderator casually injects challenges to the seriousness of Walt's position (lines 6, 8, and 14). These challenges are not attended to as challenges by the boys. Walt does not orient to the challenges until the end of the excerpt. But rather than trying to manage it in a way that might preserve his stake in being a guy interested in both "getting girls" while not being misogynistic about it, Walt dismisses his position entirely. Not only does he dismiss it, but he also displays disgust with it ("UGGH NO") and not only disgust but also embarrassment as he lowers his voice to spell out the word *sex* in saying that he does not plan to have "S-E-X with ↑ ANY of them." What is important about this excerpt is that Walt vacillates from one extreme to another in a rather obvious and transparent way. Although NS is

relevant, there is little attempt to negotiate or manage the dilemmas circulating around it.

In this final excerpt from the ten year olds, the dilemma surrounding liking a girl based on her looks versus her "personality" is occasioned. Although this dilemma is occasioned numerous times in the data, what is particularly special about this excerpt is not simply the way Lou displays interest in looks (which is common) but also the way he openly and unapologetically downplays the importance of intelligence in a girl, going so far as to note that intelligent girls will show you up (line 19) and bore you (line 26). His position is unguarded and direct.

Excerpt 3

Participants: M: Moderator, R: Rick, L: Lou, J: Jamal, Ju: Jude

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- 1 M: allright (.) what I want to know is (.) what is impor (.) what is important in a girl
 2 Ju: her personality
 3 M: her personality
 4 J: HER LEGS ((laughter, 2.0))
 5 M: ↑her legs (.) so good looks (.) anything else (3.0) like (.) does she have to be smart
 6 R: uhh::: uggh (.)°smart but uh (.) but not that smart°=
 7 M: =yeah (.) she has to be smart (.) but not that smart
 8 L: not Mrs. Albert Einstein
 9 M: not too smart (.) why not
 10 L: uh:: cause they be acting up with their intelligencia
 11 R: what does that mean
 12 L: intelligence in Spanish
 13 M: okay (.) so you don't want that
 14 L: NO
 15 M: same for you two ((to Rick and Jamal))
 16 R: uhh::: ((looks at Jamal))
 17 M: you don't want a girlfriend that is too smart
 18 J: nah (.) I guess:: I'll take a smart (.) a smart girl=
 19 L: =NO (.) cause then they OUTSMART you
 20 J: huh
 21 M: ((to Jamal)) so you want to have a girlfriend that is smart
 22 L: ((to Jamal)) yeah cause YOU like Leah Jameson=
 23 J: =no I don't (.) she's UGLY
 24 M: well let's hear then (.) Rick (.) why is that important for them NOT to be=
 25 L: =cause then if she starts talking about electricity or something (.) I'd be all
 26 ((throws his head back, rolls eyes, slight snoring noises)) ((laughter, 2.0))
-

The first notable feature of this excerpt is Lou and Ralph's admission in lines 6 and 8 that a girl should be smart "but not *that* smart." As Ralph introduces this sentiment in line 6, he noticeably pauses and hedges and speaks slowly, so as to index caution. It is delivered as if there is something potentially controversial about it, although there is little else done to soften the trouble that might be heard in the remarks. In fact, rather than managing the remarks, Lou upgrades the evaluation, saying that girls that are too smart will

“act up” with their intelligence (line 10) and will “outsmart” you (line 19). There are several places where the moderator gently probes their position with questions like “not too smart (. . .) why not” and “so you *don't* want that” (see lines 9, 13, 17). Although probes like this appear to “seek clarification,” when they are repeated over several turns they are hearable as soft challenges, implying that there is something about the position that the questioner is having difficulty accepting or believing (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995). As we have seen in the last two excerpts, these types of soft challenges are not taken up as such by the boys. They do not seem to be relevant. Jamal is the one boy who tentatively disagrees with Lou and Ralph, saying that he “guess(es)” he’ll “take” a smart girl (line 18). When the moderator follows up with Jamal (line 21), Lou polices Jamal’s response by interjecting a tease (“yeah cause YOU like Leah Jameson”) that works to expose Jamal’s motivation for liking smart girls. Jamal’s quick denial (“no I don’t”) and his admission that Leah is “UGLY” work to counter his own counter to Lou and Ralph’s hegemonic position. Like Lou and Ralph, he has just described his interest in a girl based solely on physical attraction.

The common thread in each of the excerpts from the ten year olds (and in the ten-year-old corpus in general) is that although they do construct forms of NS in their talk, they do not preemptively orient to the “trouble” of such positions. In other words, they rarely orient to norms that are against overly affiliating with forms of NS. Although they do display embarrassment and mark their potentially NS-sounding positions with hedges and laughter, they do very little else to negotiate and manage the dilemmas in such positions. And when such positions are gently challenged, they either do not attend to the challenges as challenges or altogether deny complicity with such positions (as Walt does at the end of excerpt 2). In the twelve year olds (and especially the fifteen year olds), their positions are more sensitive to potential counters and challenges, and are designed to deflect those challenges while simultaneously maintaining an affiliation with stereotypical forms of masculinity.

Analysis of Twelve Year Olds

One of the more pronounced strategies in the twelve year olds’ talk was a naturalization or normalization of the inevitability of being attracted (as males) to girls based on their looks and, as such, a complicity with the NS features of the “male sex drive discourse,” which posits that males have a natural sex drive and thus a biological or natural excuse for wanting and pursuing it (Hollway 1983). To counter real and anticipated challenges to their endorsement of this, the twelve year olds would often work to promote the idea that they are simply telling “the truth” (appeals to honesty) and that “this is just the way it is” (a tautological rhetoric that normalizes the status quo). Although the following excerpt is playful, pay attention to the way Walt

appeals to the "seriousness" (line 10) and "truthfulness" (line 40) of their celebration and objectification of physical attraction.

Excerpt 4

Participants: M: Moderator, W: Walt, B: Brice, S: Seth, Bo: Bob, A: Amos

1 M: okay (.) so (.) what what's about girls (.) what is there that guys like=
 2 A: =a lot of stuff
 3 M: ↑like
 4 A: =uh (.) chest (.) their chest=
 5 W: =ass
 6 B: what
 7 A: their chest
 8 S: their CHEST ((laughter, 2.0)) butts and chests ((laughter, 2.0))
 9 → M: =no (.) but seriously
 10 → W: WE ARE SERIOUS ((laughter, 2.0))
 11 B: butts and chests ((laughter, 1.0))
 12 M: so what is it that girls find interesting in you ((laughter, 13.0))
 13 you guys (.) you guys
 14 ((LAUGHTER, 10.0))
 15 W: STRAIGHTNESS
 16 S: ((under his breath)) °big balls°=
 17 B: =that you're as straight as a circle=
 18 W: =(to Bob) okay (.) let's not talk about yourself (.) just kiddin'=
 19 B: =stomach muscles=
 20 S: ((under breath)) a big ugggh ((makes grunting sound))
 21 M: so Amos (.) Amos=
 22 W: =they care about: BIG:::=
 23 B: =stomach muscles ((laughter, 1.0))=
 24 M: =amos (.) amos is spea'=
 25 W: =they care about THE SI:::ZE =
 26 M: =WALT=
 27 B: =under the belt=
 28 W: =under the belt (.) yep=
 29 B: =the SIZE UNDER THE BELT=
 30 → M: =Walt (.) come on Walt=
 31 → W: =well what else is under the belt=
 32 M: =Walt=
 33 B: =no (.) THE SIZE BETWEEN THE THIGHS ((laughter, 5.0))
 34 W: oh my god Im seriously gonna die laughing ((laughing, 3.0))
 35 M: but don't girls find like different things (.) like brains or=
 36 S: =nope (.) just BIG BALLS ((laughter, 4.0))
 37 W: they care about your baseballs and bats ((Laughter, 4.0)) your HOME
 38 RUN TOOLS
 39 → M: guys (.) guys (.) is this the way ALL of you guys are
 40 → W: well it's the TRUTH ((laughter, 4.0))
 41 M: ((over laughter)) is this the way all of you guys are ((laughter, 5.0))
 42 B: yeah (.) your home run tools ((laughter, 1.0)) your twig and berries

Although this excerpt contains a glut of “compulsory” objectification of physical appearance, it is done with humor, colloquial forms of vulgarity, and a high degree of collusion. In other words, it appears lighthearted. In three relevant places (marked with →), the moderator challenges the boys about the seriousness or believability of their statements. In two of those places (lines 10 and 40), Walt exclaims that they are being serious and that they are telling the truth, and he says so emphatically. There is no attempt to soften or mitigate the extremity of their positions, nor is there an appeal to the tongue-in-cheek “we’re just joking” form of mitigation. Appeals to “honesty,” “seriousness,” and “straightforwardness” all carry a certain rhetorical weight to them, particularly when they are delivered with emphatic stress. The emphatic stress casts the claims themselves as the “natural” or “inevitable” outcomes of their life context(s). They have a “this is the way it is” type of tautological rhetorical persuasion. Consider the next excerpt in which the boys brag about their voyeuristic attraction for spying on girls. Of particular interest is with the way they deflect accusations of impropriety by arguing that their voyeurism is a natural or inevitable response to being led on and teased by the girls, thus downplaying their own agency and culpability.

Excerpt 5

Participants: M: Moderator, E: Ernie, J: Jasper, W: Wilson, A: Aaron

-
- 1 W: I've really gone into a girls' bathroom and I've gone into a girls' locker room=
 2 J: =oh:: the nastiest thing in the world=
 3 W: =one time was kinda' on accident
 4 M: whadaya' think the girls think about it=
 5 J: =no (.) they didn't see us=
 6 W: =I thought it was cool when I walked in
 7 M: but still (.) don't you think you are invading their::=
 8 J: =I wasn't (.) cause I thought it was CO-ED
 9 W: I had to pee I had to pee and when I walked in and saw the toilets (.) and I
 10 didn't see ours (.) well (.) I LIKED it (.) I enjoyed it
 11 J: I've seen girls walking into the locker room where
 12 the pool is (.) and when I was in the guys locker room (.) OH GOD (.)
 13 it's so:: ((puts hands over face)) it's like I walked in and
 14 I was gonna take a shower and I was like AGGGHHH
 15 A: yo (.) yeah like that time at the State College pool=
 16 J: =that's just what I was saying (.) at the State college pool=
 17 E: =OH MAN YEAH (.) they be walking in all naked=
 18 J: =they be like hi how are you doing
 19 M: =so wait (.) let's think about that (1.0) that guys are walking into girls=
 20 → W: = well they be ALWAYS::: trying to model for us (.) so::=
 21 → E: =and GIRLS be doing the very same thing (.) they'd be like ↑OHH lemme
 22 see your package=
 23 M: =not girls
 24 → W: OH YES (.) yes they do (.) they are just as perverted as guys (.) it's just a
 25 misconception that girls are more polite (.) because my sisters (.) I am telling
 26 you (.) UGGHH these people ((pounds table)) are such sick (.) UGGHH

- 27 and they are my sisters too (.) but it's true
 28 J: oh yeah (.) cause one time I was like in the bathroom ((demonstrates
 29 standing at urinal)) and I looked back and say like three girls were watching
 30 and I had to pull my pants up
-

Their management of NS surfaces most visibly in line 20 as Wilson inoculates against the challenge that they are inappropriately engaging in lascivious behavior. Wilson uses the extreme case formulation of *always* in "they be ALWAYS:: trying to model for us" to emphasize that the phenomena of interest (their spying behavior) is motivated "by the object," or is objective, rather than caused by the boys' own tendencies. Coupled with the tag of "so" at the end, the evaluation positions their actions as a natural or inevitable response to the situation of girls "modeling" for them. It is thus the girls who motivate them to engage in NS forms of voyeurism and ogling. Wilson bolsters this rhetorical move (lines 24-25) by building a symmetry between boys and girls, noting that it is a misconception that girls are "more polite" than boys. Although that may be the accepted norm, in "reality" girls are just as perverse as guys. This places girls' motives on par with the boys' motives. This yet again allows the boys to characterize their behavior as normal or ordinary and symmetrical with girls. Although this does not entirely prevent the counter that this behavior is still inappropriate (perhaps for both sexes), it does soften accusations that they are being immature or disrespectful because they are male. And, furthermore, by creating symmetry between the motives of boys and girls, it softens the potential accusation that they are exercising inequality and are thus sexist.

In this final excerpt from the twelve year olds, Wilson's comment in line 12 seems designed as a counter to an anticipated challenge. To manage forms of NS, he counters with yet another type of claim that mitigates against prejudice by appealing to the objective features of the situation, making their descriptions appear natural, inevitable, accurate, and hence unmotivated by perversion or immaturity.

Excerpt 6

Participants: M: Moderator, E: Ernie, J: Jasper, W: Wilson, A: Aaron

- 1 E: oh man (.) there's the one kid in our class saying he's all getting it (.)
 2 but uggh (.) man (.) just look at our class man (.) no one would want that stuff
 3 J: they're all so u::gly=
 4 E: =nah man (.) nobody would even talk to him
 5 A: we're talking about our class (.) not your class=
 6 W: =the only one (.) the only girl that actually looks good is Katie (.) that actually
 7 comes close=
 8 A: =NO::
 9 E: she's got big breasts (.) but that's all
 10 W: yeah (.) CAUSE OF HER RACK
 11 A: she's got bigger breasts than some 10th graders

- 12 → W: ((looks to Moderator)) seriously SHE'S GOT SOME HONKERS
 13 M: uh: (.) okay (1.0) I believe you (.) uh:: hhh=
 14 J: =BEEP BE::EP ((Laughter, 2.0)) ((to Moderator)) cause he said HONKERS
 15 so I just had to
 16 M: guys (.) uh:: how do you think girls feel about you saying this kind of =
 17 → J: =I don't care (.) they talk about our stomachs and butts and all that stuff=
 18 M: =talking about your stomach (.) isn't that something different
 19 E: no (.) cause look at it (.) look at it ((shows everyone his stomach)) see I don't care

While discussing which girls are attractive enough to have sex with, the boys begin to describe a girl who has “big breasts” and a “rack” that causes her to “come close” to being good enough for “getting it” on. As the objectified physical description of her is worked up, Wilson turns to the moderator in line 12 and says “seriously SHE’S GOT SOME HONKERS.” The modifier “seriously” attends to an imagined challenge. It attends to the possibility that their remarks may be heard as nonserious, exaggerated, or nonobjective in some way, and thus works to secure believability and camaraderie with the moderator. As with the previous excerpts, Wilson’s aside to the moderator casts their own ogling as a natural or inevitable response to the objective (or serious) features of the girl’s physical appearance. It is thus not a result of their own perversion or hypersexuality. When the moderator asks them directly (line 16) to imagine how the girls might feel about this kind of talk, Jasper does not soften or downplay the connotation of sexism. Rather, like Wilson’s move in the previous excerpt, he dismisses the relevance of the challenge on the grounds that they are only doing what the girls also do. This yet again naturalizes and normalizes the sexual objectification of physical appearance.

What is common among the twelve year olds (as distinct from the ten year olds) is the way they discursively use fact making, “consensus formulations” that work to normalize a state of affairs (their complicity with NS) by treating empirical realities (the way girls dress or flirt, for instance) as causal forces (Edwards and Potter 1992). For the twelve year olds, these consensus formulations work as inoculating procedures for managing the potential trouble of NS. Forms of NS are treated as status quo and, as such, are normalized as inevitable and ordinary in the ongoing development and maturation of their masculine identities.

Analysis of Fifteen Year Olds

Although the fifteen year olds frequently admit that it is quite common for men to try to normalize or naturalize the inevitability of being drawn to girls based on their physical appearance, they do not treat the normality and pervasiveness of it as sufficient justifications for engaging with it. They typically recognize that there is something potentially inappropriate or prejudicial

about playing the "it's natural, inevitable, and ordinary" card. Their strategies for managing NS are at the cusp of becoming strategically inscrutable, evasive, and adultlike in complexity. In other words, they are increasingly infused with deniability. They are often marked with an ironic knowingness or a tongue-in-cheek quality of self-reflexiveness, candor, or wit. On the surface, it may appear that these boys are resolving or dissolving their complicity with NS, at least more so than the twelve year olds. But on closer inspection, this may not be the case. The following excerpts illustrate four distinctive strategies used by the fifteen year olds to manage forms of NS: (1) the appearance-reality distinction, (2) denials of NS with built-in concessions, (3) denying the critical features of NS, and (4) suppression (or "biting one's tongue").

The Appearance-Reality Distinction

In the exchange below, the boys are asked to account for "growing up" (or maturing) in the context of "falling for girls' looks." Don's final turn (lines 15-18) is particularly strategic.

Excerpt 7

Participants: M: Moderator, D: Don, H: Hal, A: Andi

-
- 1 M: so is part of growing up not falling for good looks (.) is that (.)
 2 what do you guys think of that
 3 D: if you don't know em' (.) like if you are in the mall (.) then it's the
 4 very first thing ya' gonna notice (1.0) you never gonna automatically
 5 tell that they have [a good personality]
 6 H: [>yah, you gott::a] go with the looks first<=
 7 D: =ya' gonna ALWAYS go to looks first=
 8 M: =↓>yeah yeah (.) okay<=
 9 H: =and if you know the person at school first (.) and like they're not
 10 to:::tally pretty but not tha::t ugly (.) but if they have a good
 11 personality (.) then you go out with em'=
 12 M: =↑yeah=
 13 D: =to see if it works out (.) ya know (.) you go out to see what happens
 14 M: would you also say that that is part of:: maturing (.) and possibly=
 15 → D: =see (.) even though we just joke around with the girls and pretend to be all
 16 like ((acts like he is eyeing someone up and down)) <yah::: umm::: that's nice::>
 17 you know (.) acting like we're not mature (.) but see (.) we just act like that
 18 cause we wanna↑ have fun (.) just for fun (.) that's just the way we are
-

Of particular relevance is the way Don's final turn is sequentially designed in three relevant parts to deflect the charge of sexism or immaturity. He opens with an initial "preface" that denotes what is being connoted by the moderator's questions, follows this with a "mitigated rejection" of the connotation,

and then completes it with an “account” of their real or true motivations (cf. Wooffitt, 2001).

Preface =see (.) even though we just joke around with the girls and pretend to be all like ((acts like he is eyeing someone up and down)) <yah:: umm:: that's nice:> you know (.) acting like we're *not* mature (.)

Mitigated rejection but see (.) we just act like that

Account cause we wanna ↑*have fun* (.) just for fun (.) that's just the way we are

The ability to linguistically sequence this type of three-part counter is a developmentally discursive skill not found in the younger boys' talk. Rhetorically, it not only reoccasions their more NS-sounding position of being inevitably attracted to girls' looks (as seen with the twelve year olds) but also goes on to soften this position by characterizing it is a façade. The mitigated rejection (“but see . . .”) takes into account how their actions may appear, thus demonstrating the reasonableness of others' (mis)interpretations. In other words, those making the mis(interpretations) are wrong, but understandably so. Consenting to the reasonableness of the challenge before rejecting it adds to the credibility of the defense. His counter works to carefully deflect the challenge by suggesting that there is something nonliteral about their actions. Don's repeated use of the case softener “just” adds to this.

Taken together, these conversational devices index an appearance-reality distinction (Edwards 1991). The distinction suggests that the boys are not actually doing what they appear to be doing or what would be literally implied given the surface appearance of their NS-sounding banter. They want us to believe that they are not really hypersexual in their actions toward girls. Unlike the ten year olds, however, they do work to preserve some notion that they are still invested in being attracted to girls' looks and even admit to enjoying eyeing them up and down. And unlike the twelve year olds, they do not simply take the position that they have a right to do this as a natural or inevitable male response. Rather, what motivates them is something more playful and seemingly innocuous (“just having fun”), and not something compulsory, perverted, or immature (although they admit it can appear that way). What is key here is the way Don linguistically reconstructs the connoted challenge in a way that builds in a plausible deniability such that it can now be seen as a reasonable, albeit false interpretation.

Denials with Built-in Concessions

Another way the fifteen year olds show interest in “girls' looks” while deflecting accusations of being overly preoccupied with them is to craft denials with built-in concessions (Antaki and Wetherell 1999; Speer and Potter 2000). The concession usually comes after an initial proposition to soften the

original claim, which is then often followed by a revised, weaker statement than the original proposition. The structure is as follows:

1. Initial proposition (hearable as extreme)
2. Concession (positions the original proposition as disputable)
3. Revised, weaker statement (hearable now as more reasoned)

In the excerpt below, Don and Hal build two rather robust concessions in managing their position on the importance of girls' looks.

Excerpt 8

Participants: M: Moderator, D: Don, H: Hal, A: Andi

-
- 1 M: so looks (.) ↑important (.) not that important really, or=
 2 D: =no (.) not=
 3 M: =although good looking is not bad
 4 D: yeah (.) but not unless like you don't know em' not unless (.) only
 5 when you don't know em (.) then looks do everything for you
 6 M: but (.) you know (.) do you think guys are more interested in girls'
 7 looks than girls are interested in guys' looks
 8 H: guys are more so (.) but you have to go through a certain number
 9 of girls first (.) like that number in growing up (.) you know (.) to
 10 see through girls (1.0) I don't know if they've ((motions to other boys))
 11 went through that (.) I did and I don't really count on looks no more (.)
 12 but it still has to be there (.) you know (.) you can't be like the ugliest
 13 girl (.) you know (.) it still has to be like half-and-half (.) I don't want
 14 like the prettiest girl in the world=
 15 D: =you can't always have it (.) you can't always have the prettiest girl
 16 H: ((leans into Don and Andy)) °I did though (.) remember Kayla°
 17 A: [ahh yea'
 18 D: [OHH:: ah yeah ((looks to moderator)) he did (.) he
 19 was like the luckiest man in the world
-

Below is a paraphrased version of the structure of their denials with concessions:

1. Initial proposition (line 5: Only when you don't know them, looks do everything for you)
2. Concession 1 (lines 8-11: But as you grow older, you count on looks less and less)
3. Revised, weaker statement (line 12: Although looks are still necessary)
4. Concession 2 (line 15: But you can't always have the prettiest girl)
5. Revised, weaker statement (line 16: But I once did have the prettiest girl, remember Kayla)

The basic job of the concession is to soften the extremity of the original proposition. Concessions anticipate and deflect the threat of potential coun-

ters to propositions. Hal's first concession (lines 8-11) does at least three things. It softens the extremity of Don's original proposition, it insulates their interest in girls' looks from reproach, and it makes Hal appear sexually experienced, mature, and reasonable. Despite his concession, however, Hal shifts back (line 12) to the tenor of the original proposition in saying, "but it still has to be there (.) you know (.) you can't be like the ugliest girl." This reassertion seems designed to counter the concession itself, as if to make sure Hal does not now appear totally uninterested in girls' looks. But then, both he and Don (lines 14-15) soften this by admitting that having the prettiest girl is not always possible, nor do they necessarily want it. Again, this concession anticipates counters and offers a more sanguine account of their maturity.

Hal's aside to Don in line 16 (I did though (.) remember Kayla) and Don's celebration of it (lines 18-19), however, work yet again as a reassertion that undermines the job of the concession. It seems to be a throwback to a rather NS-sounding position of trophyism (Brooks 1997). But because it is delivered as an afterthought (with Hal turning to Don and saying it with a lowered voice), it carries a kind of "off-the-record" quality, making its status as a direct reassertion to the original proposition ambiguous. The laughter constructs the aside as both ironic, and thus less serious, yet also invested in some way. In other words, although the concession allows Hal and Don to counter the threat of appearing overly preoccupied by looks, the design of the reassertion allows them to buy back into a kind of trophyism that celebrates Hal's status as a (hetero)sexual man ("luckiest man in the world") for having been with a really pretty girl. By using concessions to manage forms of NS, the boys are able to vacillate back and forth between NS- and non-NS-sounding positions.

Denying Critical Features

In the following excerpt, the boys categorically deny possessing certain features that are arguably taken to index an affiliation with a certain category of boys that are preoccupied with looks. As Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) noted, adolescents often warrant their denials of membership into social categories by denying that they possess certain attributes or behaviors that (from their perspectives) define membership. Often, these attributes are described to appear extreme and thus in need of resistance. Wetherell and Edley (1999) have referred to such resistance work as "differentiation," which is a process of defining oneself negatively in contrastive "not us" terms. Doing this is rather tricky, for it entails a careful exaggeration of the more extreme behaviors or views that are "out there," then undermining the extremity of those views through contrastive counterclaims (Speer and Potter 2000). Consider the following excerpt:

Excerpt 9

Participants: M: Moderator, D: Don, H: Hal, A: Andi

-
- 1 M: okay listen (.) so is it that the girls think that the guys are only looking
 2 for looks and =
 3 D: =depends on the guy (.) cause [some ()]
 4 A: [some guys] just look for looks
 5 M: is that a common thing
 6 A: yeah
 7 M: very common (1.0)
 8 so you think you all are different from these guys
 9 ((all three boys nod))
 10 M: you think so huh (.) Hal (.) you too
 11 H: yeah (.) those guys annoy me actually (.) like the guys that are all OHH
 12 she has such a nice bu::tt (.) OH::: I like it so::: much" ((laughter, 1.0))
 13 M: now are these also kids in your group
 14 D: yeah (.) like we say:: that (.) like but if we really wanna go out with em' (.)
 15 we like just say ↓hey you have a nice ass" (.) just say that and like (.) but
 16 DON'T be like ↑HEY::: I WANNA GO OUT ((laughter, 1.0))
-

Beginning in line 3, the boys counter the generality of NS by endorsing a bit of relativism ("depends on the guy"), which opens the landscape of possible masculine positions. Although they admit that a preoccupation with looks is common, they claim to be different from these types of guys. The way Hal does this is particularly interesting. His use of "actually" in line 11 not only performs differentiation but also counters the implicit assumption that such a difference may not have been immediately obvious had he not said so. Furthermore, the exaggerated caricature of how these "other guys" act (lines 11-12) works to solidify how they are "over the top" or extreme in their interest in girls' bodies. Yet, when the moderator challenges them by implying that these "other" boys are actually their friends (line 13), Don suggests that unlike the other boys, they objectify girls' bodies in a more smooth, reserved, and relaxed way.

In other words, the boys are not interested in resisting a normative male preoccupation with girls' looks because there is something in principle wrong with such a preoccupation. They are simply resisting overt displays of obvious and desperate infatuation with girls' looks in order to appear calm and confident when asking a girl out. What bothers Don and Hal about these other boys is not the fact that they are preoccupied with girls' looks. Even Don offers a bit of advice on how to properly tell a girl she has a nice ass (lines 15-16). The problem with the other boys is simply their poor *style* in doing objectification. This difference is subtly conveyed, but it is instrumental in reclaiming NS. Seeing this indirect endorsement of NS in the moment of interaction would be difficult because the differentiation is performed with

exaggeration and humor, thus insulating it with a tongue-in-cheek quality that can be denied or easily resisted if challenged.

Suppression (Biting One's Tongue)

Like in the excerpt above, the boys point out that boys in general are interested in girls based on their looks. But when asked by the moderator (in line 9 below) whether they are different from these boys, the boys do not simply agree and engage in the kind of differentiation that we saw in excerpt 9. Rather, Ernie and Bob perform the subtle act of suppressing their thoughts or "biting their tongue[s]" (Gough 2001). The suppression is couched within a rhetorical question that itself works as a counter to an anticipated challenge.

Excerpt 10

Participants: M: Moderator, B: Bob, D: Dirk, C: Carl, E: Ernie

-
- 1 D: when girls go out with boys (.) I don't think uh (.) I think it is much less for
2 looks than it is for guys (.) when boys want to go out=
3 B: =yeah boys want looks=
4 C: =it's much more for looks=
5 B: =boys do want looks=
6 D: =and if girls go out with boys (.) it's because they actually LIKE the boy=
7 E: =this is true=
8 B: =WHICH IS GOOD FOR US (.) cause then we get to go out (.) assuming we
9 ever go out
10 M: so then is it personality that matters for you all (.) is that (.) is that (.) yeah or =
11 → E: =but (.) well yeah (.) but then I mean (.) what are we supposed to say (.) that
12 we like Britney Spears for her music (.) come on=
13 B: =right (.) yeah ((laughter, 2.0))
-

The suppression begins in line 11 as Ernie hedges ("but (.) well yeah (.) but then I mean"), displaying a hesitancy in either affirming or denying the moderator's question. Although the exact meaning of the hedges is unclear, they do interactively display at the very least that there is something at stake in either affirming or denying that personality is what matters for them. It foreshadows the rather familiar ideological dilemma between being interested in girls for their looks or their personality. Rather than taking a clear position, Ernie openly bites his tongue and suppresses his thoughts by orienting to the norm against sexist (or NS) talk that seems to constrain him from answering in a straightforward way ("what are we *supposed* to say"). Ernie's suppression is couched within a rhetorical question about liking Britney Spears simply for her music. The tag remark of "come on" is highly functional because it works to problematize the very reasonableness of the question itself. We are left with the impression that there is an obvious sentiment that isn't being overtly said. The sentiment seems to be complicit with NS but

also sensitive to the norm against being openly complicit with NS. As with the other strategies used by the fifteen year olds, Ernie's suppression is insinuatingly strategic in simultaneously denying and affirming the features of NS.

DISCUSSION

The general aim of this analysis has been to offer a detailed and contextually sensitive exploration of several of the more salient discursive *processes* used by ten, twelve, and fifteen year olds for managing NS in focus-group interactions. As shown in the data, there are appreciable differences between the age groups. The ten year olds' strategies are neither robust nor indirect in managing their collusion with or against NS, nor do they consistently orient to the potential trouble of NS positions. What they do is display a rather obvious and facile type of embarrassment about being physically attracted to girls. In contrast, the twelve year olds are more sensitive to potential counters and challenges to their endorsement of NS. To manage this, they often naturalize the inevitability of being attracted to girls' looks. They work up these positions through appeals to "objective" honesty and by arguing that their preoccupation with looks is caused by the girls' own flirtatious behavior. The fifteen year olds' strategies are arguably more subtle and indirect. They are able to make their actions appear nonliteral as well as reconstruct challenges so that they can be countered. Their use of concessions allows them to quietly pivot back and forth between complicity and noncomplicity with NS, sometimes with an "off-the-record" or afterthought quality that appears tongue-in-cheek. Their use of differentiation involves carefully constructed exaggerations of the behavior of "other" boys as well as the subtle and believable use of contrastive counterclaims. And with suppression, they are able to indirectly occasion the reasonableness of NS while *not* saying so outright, thus showing their sensitivity to norms against NS.

These differences seem to suggest that strategies for managing NS change throughout developmental time. As the boys age, their negotiation strategies seem to increasingly work against "fixity"—that is, they are increasingly able to orient to more than one ideological position at a time, even when challenged. The data from the fifteen year olds seem to suggest that by midadolescence, boys not only are routinely able to keep forms of NS indirectly "alive" but also have the cognitive and discursive skills to be able to anticipate and then discursively inoculate against the threat of appearing prejudiced. These achievements raise the question yet again concerning what counts as the successful or unsuccessful "resolution" of NS. When analyzing conversational social practices, the notion of resolution may not be very helpful. When one interrogates the everyday talk of young men, we see that

claims that index features of NS are often dilemmatic and equivocal, and sometimes contradictory.

This suggests that NS may look very different depending on the socio-cultural contexts in which it made discursively relevant and, moreover, that within these cultural contexts, there may be age-related interpretations and constructions that are distinctively unique, routine, or common. As such, rather than thinking in terms of resolving NS as a monolithic developmental stage, it would be more helpful to scrutinize the processes used that keep NS alive in certain age-related sociocultural contexts while attempting to appear nonhegemonic or nonserious about it—that is, processes that allow forms of NS to resist fixity, to accommodate ostensibly alien cultural values, and to appear status quo. After all, this contextual fluidity is the aspect of NS that makes it (like most forms of hegemonic masculinity) not only adaptive but also pernicious when unexamined.

This ushers in a new approach to gender and identity analysis, one that is highly commensurate with the work already being carried out by critical-minded psychologists and feminist-inspired sociologists who have repeatedly pushed for a fuller account of gender relations (see Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1995; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1987; Kimmel and Messner 1992; Mac an Ghail 1994; Mandel and Shakeshaft 2000). It is an approach that takes seriously the social business that the participants themselves are conducting when they talk about aspects of normative masculinity. It provides a more elaborate account of what we mean by *masculine norms* and of the conversational processes of taking up and managing those norms. It introduces new ways of analyzing NS, ways that do not conceptualize complicity and resistance to NS in either/or terms but as labels to describe the effects of discursive strategies mobilized in particular contexts.

Seen this way, exploring the interactive and ideological management of sexual identity development becomes an analytic endeavor unto itself. Exploring the management of such dilemmas is in many ways a timely response to the “crisis” in masculinity that looms over the broader cultural context of gender relations. During adolescence, boys are particularly encouraged to be independent, confident, and secure in their masculinity while simultaneously abandoning their oppressive habits by practicing openness, tolerance, and sensitivity. In ordinary talk, these dilemmas are managed not simply by adhering to already established cultural beliefs, but rather are “lived” dilemmas that are constantly being rhetorically and interactively managed within local conversations. The value of discursive approach for critical work on masculinity is that it reveals that it is precisely the negotiation strategies for managing the dilemmas of NS that change as the young men progressively account for themselves throughout developmental time.

The present analysis has attempted to detail several of the discursive methods that adolescent boys may use to routinely manage the dilemmas circulating around NS. The analysis has attempted to underscore the dexterity

that young men learn to exhibit for shifting between ideological and interactive dilemmas. It also allows us to see that it is in the "commonness" of multiple and sometimes conflicting conversational positions that dilemmas are managed and forms of NS are made resilient. The methods and strategies the boys use in their local conversations are, however, more than simply "discursive" (or just "talk"). Methods of self-accounting are also "psycho-discursive" (Wetherell and Edley 1999). Through their repeated use throughout developmental time, they become self-formative and onto-formative. These methods and strategies involve the construction of a psychological sense of motive, feeling, intention, and desire that comes to constitute one's personal and social identity. Harnessing this insight for work on sexual/gender identity development would not only help researchers to understand how young men interpret and manage forms of NS throughout development, but it would also better prepare clinicians, parents, and educators in exposing and challenging the ways that NS remains indirectly and subtly parasitic on (and constitutive of) "masculine" forms of gender identity.

Appendix Transcription Conventions

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| (.) | Short pause of less than 1 second |
| (1.5) | Timed pause in seconds |
| [overlap] | Overlapping speech |
| ↑ | Rising intonation |
| ↓ | Falling intonation |
| °quieter° | Encloses talk that is quieter than the surrounding talk |
| LOUD | Talk that is louder than the surrounding talk |
| Bold | Words emphasized by the transcriber for analytic purposes |
| <u>Emphasis</u> | Emphasis |
| >faster< | Encloses talk that is faster than the surrounding talk |
| <slower> | Encloses talk that is slower than the surrounding talk |
| (brackets) | Encloses words the transcriber is unsure about |
| ((comments)) | Encloses comments from the transcriber |
| Rea:::ly | Elongation of the prior sound |
| . | Stop in intonation |
| = | Immediate latching of successive talk |
| [...] | Where material from the tape has been omitted for reasons of brevity. |

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