

Inoculating Against Prejudice: A Discursive Approach to Homophobia and Sexism in Adolescent Male Talk

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This article uses a discursive psychological approach to examine the subtle ways that adolescent boys attempt to position themselves as both normatively heterosexual and unprejudiced as they manage homophobia and sexism in their talk. It is argued that homophobia and sexism are given meanings within social interaction, meanings that involve negotiating competing ideological and normative dilemmas. The analysis examines the positioning strategies used by young men to appear simultaneously complicit and resistant to masculine norms. The practical value in this work is that it provides psychologists with insight into the subtle and indirect (but pervasive) ways that young men are able to inoculate themselves from appearing obviously or unknowingly complicit with homophobia and sexism while engaging with heteronormative masculinity.

Within the past decade, researchers within the new psychology of men's studies have conceptualized homophobia and sexism as co-occurring gender-role orientations that are central in masculine gender-role ideology (see Kilianski, 2003). Current research (Begany & Milburn, 2002; Kilianski, 2003; Walker, Tokar, & Fischer, 2000) has shown that men who endorse homophobic and sexist items on questionnaires are more likely to endorse hegemonic masculinity items on other measures. The questionnaires used have proved to be valid tools for measuring men's conformity to homophobic and sexist items and for correlating such conformity with endorsements of other normative dimensions of the male role. This instrumentation has not, however, revealed the processes by which men actually conform to and resist homophobic and sexist social norms and ideologies and how that conformity (and resistance) becomes situated in the everyday discourse of men. The use of inventories and scales has not examined the multifaceted, contradictory, or strategic ways that men actively construct homophobia and sexism in their talk. These instruments are not designed to investigate the everyday mundane ways in which homophobia and sexism are practiced and made to seem natural or inevitable and thus hegemonic. Nor are they equipped to explain the conundrum concerning men who are adept at camouflaging their prejudice,

thus remaining simultaneously complicit and non-complicit with hegemonic forms of masculinity.

The aim of this article is to use a discursive psychological approach (Bamberg, in press; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) to examine the highly subtle and context-sensitive ways that young men manage homophobia and sexism in social interaction. Using focus group data from a longitudinal study of 10-15-year-old male discourse development, I conceptualize homophobia and sexism as highly interactive and discursively constructed social categories that boys draw on in doing their masculine identities. Within a discursive orientation, the goal is not simply to chart out the various attitudes, opinions, or beliefs that men have about homophobia or sexism. A discursive psychological approach assumes that when people talk about homophobia or sexism, they are doing far more than simply conveying ideational or normative information. They are also socially constructing particular versions of homophobia and sexism, versions that are always rhetorically meaningful, given the situation. By analyzing the rhetorical design of such constructions, a discursive approach reveals the processes involved in the production of homophobia and sexism.

Why Study Talk About Homophobia and Sexism?

As Connell (1995) and Pleck (1995) have both aptly noted, contemporary gender roles are often contradictory and inconsistent, and, as such, the distinction between complicity and noncomplicity is often blurry. Connell (1995, p. 77) has stressed that hegemonic masculinity is a "historically mobile re-

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lation" with a formidable resourcefulness, whose stability may very well lie in its flexibility to accommodate ostensibly incongruous values or norms. Empirically detailing this mobility and flexibility is possible when one examines men's actual talk about salient aspects of normative masculinity. In everyday talk, Connell has argued that most men mix forms of hegemonic complicity with noncomplicity, blending sexism with nonsexism, and mitigating their own homophobia through disclaimers, irony, and humor.

In other words, in everyday talk, the most common and pervasive forms of homophobia and sexism are often indirect. They are visible at a subtle level of innuendo, irony, and presupposition and, as such, are often rhetorically insulated and difficult to challenge without looking puritanical, naive, or lacking in a sense of humor (Mills, 2003). In everyday talk, men very rarely display or experience homophobia or sexism in the kind of straightforward way that they are asked about it on most scales and inventories. This squares nicely with recent findings among discursive researchers of masculinity, who argue that adolescent boys often do their masculinity by drawing on homophobic and sexist banter while at the same time safeguarding their positions with disclaimers and softeners to suggest more egalitarian, liberal, or sensitive portrayals of themselves (Speer & Potter, 2000; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). To date, very few discursive researchers (and even fewer psychologists) have examined how these safeguarding strategies are worked up and managed or how they become psychologically relevant in the formation of young men's masculinities.

A Discursive Psychological Approach

Discursive psychology (DP) is a social constructionist approach that applies ideas from discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and ethnomethodology to psychological issues and concepts (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). DP is concerned with identifying the rhetorical and argumentative organization of discourse. This means paying close attention to the way men's accounts are rhetorically and argumentatively organized, often taking the form of contradictory and inconsistent versions of people, motives, states of mind, or events (Billig, 1999). Although men's talk may rarely sound explicitly prejudiced, it often does (at the very least) display a sensitivity to being heard as potentially prejudiced. Displaying sensitivity requires linguistic and rhetorical work. As such, statements about one's beliefs or opinions are often con-

structed in ways that index ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988). For example, in everyday talk, a heterosexual man might try to distance himself from homosexuality without seeming obviously or unknowingly homophobic in so doing. Men may also attempt to display heterosexual desire without coming across as sexist or shallow. Doing this means negotiating the dilemmatic aspects of normative masculinity. DP is useful for examining the processes by which these dilemmas are managed—that is, how men's accounts are designed to counter the actual or potential charge of prejudice while at the same time securing a clear alignment with heteronormative masculinity.

Method

Participants

The data presented here come from the first phase of a longitudinal and cross-sectional study investigating adolescent boys' (ages 10–15 years) discourse and identity development (Bamberg, in press). Within the first phase, over 300 hr of talk were audio and video recorded from a group of 54 boys, including adult-guided and non-adult-guided discussions. All 54 of the participants were from public schools of a large metropolitan New England city. Their anonymity has been guaranteed through the provision of pseudonyms. For this article, I will specifically examine the adult-guided focus group discussion data with boys aged 14–15 years. In general, these focus groups lasted between 1.5 and 2.0 hr and were videotaped. The boys were told that the purpose of the focus groups was to generate talk about what it means, from their perspectives, to be growing up as young men. Although the focus groups were adult moderated, the discussions turned out to be open, candid, and collaborative sessions in which the boys used their own vernacular and speech idioms to collectively fashion their own perspectives to the moderator's queries (see D. L. Morgan, 1997).

Procedure

For the current analysis, I have examined one rather long and complex excerpt from a focus group comprised of 14–15-year-olds and an adult moderator. The excerpt analyzed was just under 7 min in length. Although the transcript contains 137 lines, the actual dialogue contained 110 distinct turns by 7 participants (6 boys and 1 moderator). From a discursive perspective, it is the turn-by-turn sequential unfold-

ing of these 110 distinct contributions by the 7 participants that constitute the actual data under examination. As the transcription notations in the Appendix show, the transcript contains both the actual words spoken and a series of conventions that reveal how they were spoken (intonation, emphatic stress, etc.). Because the focus group was videotaped, it was also possible to note in the transcript when speakers were looking at a specific person when making their comments.

This particular excerpt was chosen because homophobia and sexism became highly relevant during the conversation, resulting in the mobilization of a range of discursive strategies to mitigate the appearance of prejudice while simultaneously working to appear normatively heterosexual. The main reason for examining only one long stretch of data versus a larger corpus of smaller excerpts is to provide sufficient specificity and analytic detail of the discursive processes that are used to orient to and against gendered social norms. Within discursive or conversation analytic qualitative paradigms, the goals of analytic rigor, in-depth rendering of the participant's own positions, context specificity, and particularization are key evaluative criteria (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 1993).

In contrast to some ethnographic and content-analytic approaches, the goal here is not simply to report a general compendium of findings nor is it to simply offer summary snapshots, paraphrases, or general themes of the conversational data. Although these forms of analysis are useful for handling large amounts of qualitative data, their analyses and interpretations are usually conducted "off-stage," and the claims are justified through argument rather than binding to actual data. The findings are often presented as summaries of what happened in general (rather than how it happened) and thus run the risk of recapitulating common sense (see Korobov, 2002). In contrast, the goal of the current analysis is not to simply offer arguments that support the general finding that young men often work to appear nonprejudiced (something we may already know) but rather to detail how it is done—that is, the discursive processes that they specifically use to mitigate prejudice in doing their masculine identities. Although there are limitations (see the *Limitations* section) to focusing in detail on relatively small amounts of data, it is a common practice within discursive and conversation analytic research (see Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; ten Have, 1999). Such a microanalytic focus addresses the "how" question, it binds the claims to actual data, it reveals (rather than conceals) how the analysis was conducted, it invites reflexive reinter-

pretations, and it provides a concrete model for analyzing similar segments of data.

Results and Analysis

Positioning and Positioning Analysis

Drawing on a blend of techniques from conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; ten Have, 1999) and discursive social psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), I use the notion of positioning and positioning analysis to describe the boys' conversational activity (Bamberg 1997, 2000, in press; Korobov, 2001). Focusing on positioning means focusing on the ways that speakers use language to frame or situate themselves and others in talk. It specifically scrutinizes the interlocutors' conversational positions, positions that can be easily amended, modified, or abandoned. The notion of positioning conceptualizes boys as agents who interactively draw-up conversational positions that index certain cultural perspectives on masculinity, perspectives that are often dilemmatic and thus in constant need of careful management.

Analyzing conversational positioning stands as a replacement for the notion of measuring attitudes, roles, or social norms. Positions are immanent within conversations and are 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. Analyzing the ebb and flow of conversational positioning allows one to take seriously the "under construction" aspect of gender work. The value of focusing on shifting conversational positions is that it reveals how the boys move back and forth between different masculine positions of heteronormativity while working to mitigate the threat of appearing homophobic or sexist.

Data Transcripts and Analysis

For analytic purposes, the data have been divided into five sections. Each section begins with a slight topic shift (initiated by the moderator) but picks up right where the previous section left off. The exchange occurred at just over the half-way point in the focus group, at about the 76-min mark. Just prior to where Section 1 of the transcript begins, the boys were talking about people in popular culture that they admired. After a couple of minutes of the boys describing these people, the moderator casually pointed out that these people were all male. The transcript begins as the moderator performs the action of "no-

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ting" (as conversation analysts call it) that earlier in the conversation, when the boys were talking about what they admired in other men, they boldly asserted that they did not think about men in that way (in an admiring way). The moderator recalls those statements, thus making them relevant for the present talk. He points out that now the boys do not seem to have any trouble talking a lot about liking men. Noticing this generates Dirk's initial response, which makes relevant and displays his sensitivity to the notion of appearing homophobic.

Over the course of the ensuing conversation, the boys take the topic of being homophobic and draw on their own experiences to manage it, as well as their views, personal knowledge, and comfort with lesbianism and male homosexuality. What is extremely important to notice is that their talk rarely (if ever) sounds explicitly homophobic or sexist. Rather, their positions are far more equivocal and context sensitive, often shifting from one turn to another. What I will analyze is the way they manage their sensitivity to possibly being heard as homophobic or sexist and how such careful management figures centrally in the doing of their masculinities.

Section 1

Lines 1-30

Participants: Moderator (M), Alex (A), Bob (B), Carl (C), Dirk (D), Earl (E), and Frank (F)

- 1 M: so but this issue is that there are men and when I asked first what do you admire
- 2 in men Dirk said I DON'T THINK ABOUT MEN cause you were: a little:: =
- 3 D: =>what antigay<
- 4 M: yeah well is that it=
- 5 D: =(to Bob) you're homophobic =
- 6 B: =aren't we all wouldn't you say
- 7 D: [I'm not]
- 8 E: [NO]
- 9 M: what about this topic
- 10 D: I'm not homophobic =
- 11 C: =no no =
- 12 D: =(pointing to Earl) his aunts are gay
- 13 B: OH MAN ((to Dirk)) you are not supposed to say that
- 14 D: ((looks at Earl)) oh yeah but you don't care (.) right
- 15 B: ((laughing)) YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO SAY THAT DIRK
- 16 D: well my uncle's (.) my uncles are gay
- 17 M: okay well perfect (.) we don't really need to know (.) but what about this is
- 18 this a topic =
- 19 D: = YES =
- 20 M: =at school that you are talking about
- 21 B: nah not much no =

- 22 M: =about those kids or that man who is gay you know =
- 23 D: =yeah the word gay is thrown around in every conversation =
- 24 B: =except that it is not used correctly =
- 25 C: =it is used as a [derogatory thi]ng =
- 26 D: [as a put down]
- 27 C: =it's not used like the real meaning (.) it shouldn't be used as derogatory =
- 28 E: =we've had big discussions about the use of that word inappropriately =
- 29 M: =is that a topic that comes up (.) you know after ten o'clock cause you know =
- 30 B: =that is the LAST thing on our minds

The first inoculating device comes with Dirk's noticeably curt reply in Line 3, "What, antigay?" It completes the moderator's hanging speculation from Line 2. However, it completes it with a question that is rhetorically defensive. Discursive researchers refer to these types of rejoinders as ways of "seeking clarification" (see Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). However, rather than literally reflecting a genuine lack of knowledge or psychological awareness, clarification requests are rhetorically used by speakers to display that they cannot infer what it was about them (or what they said) that would cause the other to make the noticing in the first place. Seeking clarification is partly a way for Dirk to play dumb, thus placing the onus back on the moderator to reaccount for his assumption. It also shows that Dirk is proceeding as if there is a charge of prejudice lurking. To deflect the possible accusation of complicity, Dirk comes right out and names the putative topic (being "antigay") that the moderator is not naming. Naming it without hesitation is an effective discursive move. It allows him to openly display a comfort in talking about homophobia. Dirk's position throughout this first section is one of displaying knowledge and comfort in talking openly about homophobia. He uses homophobia to construct a knowing and unapologetic position that is distinct from the others present. One might argue that he is working up a position of antipolitical correctness—that is, a position that is antisensitive or antiguarded about appearing homophobic. Ironically, it is as if he is acutely sensitive to the ways that strong displays of sensitivity and guardedness can indirectly imply complicity or guilt, particularly if they are overdone.

Bob, in contrast, constantly vacillates between antigay and liberal positions. He does this in two ways. First, he normalizes homophobia in Line 6 with the extreme case marker "all" and the rhetorical question construction in "Aren't we all, wouldn't you say?" His second strategy involves chiding Dirk for being

so open about Earl's gay aunts, telling Dirk "YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO SAY THAT." The "not supposed to say" element reflects the discursive strategy of publicly biting one's tongue (Gough, 2001), something that men in particular do to show that they are suppressing (or ought to suppress) something that they want to say but know they ought not. Open displays of suppression allow men to have their cake and eat it too—that is, it gets something potentially inappropriate on record but in ways that appear less than serious about it. The laughter that accompanies Bob's display of sensitivity marks his suppression as nonliteral. The seriousness of his suppression is thus ambiguous. Although the putative content of his talk appears egalitarian and liberal, the design and delivery of it subverts this. Even though there seems to be an antigay sentiment lurking, Dirk and Bob are able to use several positioning strategies—seeking clarification (or playing dumb), normalizing homophobia, and suppression—to counter the potential threat of appearing prejudiced while maintaining a knowing and normatively heterosexual position.

Section 2

Lines 31–54

Participants: Moderator (M), Alex (A), Bob (B), Carl (C), Dirk (D), Earl (E), and Frank (F)

- 31 M: okay what about others at school (.) is there talk about gay (.) gay girls
 32 D: gay girls (.) well we see girls kissing in the halls sometimes and
 33 that's uh (.) well::: uh =
 34 B: = ↑WE DO
 35 D: well I have
 36 M: what (.) what do you think about that
 37 D: I think it's hilarious =
 38 B: = ↑hilarious =
 39 D: = cause like it's sort of you know::: like nobody minds it (.) it's
 40 so::: amusing (.) I mean like a whole crowd gathers around just like going to
 41 different classes (.) and they start kissing like out of nowhere =
 42 M: = like REAL kissing like a real =
 43 D: = [YEAH, like FRENCH] kissing
 44 M: = [or just like a kissy-kiss]
 45 C: not like a little cheek kiss
 46 D: NO (.) like what you see in the movies but not in real life
 47 E: oh yes you do (.) you see girls hugging all the time =
 48 D: = but not KISSING =
 49 E: = oh well yeah (.) no (.) I've never seen that =
 50 C: = but on the cheek (.) on the cheek or =
 51 D: = no no not there =
 52 C: = you don't see girls doing THAT

53 D: you haven't seen girls do that

54 B: well (.) you can't french kiss on the cheek

The focus of this section is on female homosexuality (Line 31). Of relevance here is the way Dirk avoids explicitly making a committed or straightforward evaluation of lesbianism. In Lines 32–33, he tries to normalize his experience with the use of "we see girls kissing . . .," and rather than saying what he personally thinks of this, he hedges with "that's uh (.) well::: uh" in Line 33. Taken literally, the hedging could imply a lack of knowledge or confusion about how to evaluate seeing girls kiss. Or, from a discursive and rhetorical perspective, it could be seen as a well-placed hedge that strategically displays sensitivity to being direct and by extension, to appearing sexist or perverted. When asked what he thinks about it (Line 36), he calls it "hilarious." Bob then orients to the potential trouble in such a characterization with his question, "hilarious?"

Dirk replies to Bob's challenge with yet another hedged performance that displays a knowing but not wanting to say position. His repair in Lines 39–41 begins with several strategically placed extreme case softeners (Edwards, 2000), such as "cause like" and "sort of," which work to soften the directness of his position. The elongated "you know:::" is a common device used by speakers to seek intersubjective collusion to mitigate personal accountability. The "you know" allows Dirk to shift focus from what he personally thinks to "what everyone knows." This subtle device allows him to switch from the hedged use of softeners to the use of the extreme case formulations (Edwards, 2000) of "nobody minds it," "so::: amusing," "whole crowd," and "out of nowhere" to construct lesbian activity as a normatively amusing and entertaining spectacle.

This subtle move has a spill-over effect. By constructing lesbianism as normatively entertaining, Dirk is able to position girls as accountable for their openly extreme displays of sexuality. Because it is the girls' activity that is the constructed through the use of extreme case formulations, the focus thus shifts from Dirk's own softly hedged views (which may be open to accusations of sexism, perversion, or hypocrisy) to the girls' seemingly intentional and erotic spectacle of sexuality. As in the previous section, the boys are continuously working up positions on homosexuality and (in this section) sexism but are doing so very indirectly. Here, Dirk's strategic use of softeners, intersubjective tokens (like "you know"), and extreme case formulations jointly work to mitigate prejudice while appearing normatively heterosexual.

Section 3

Lines 55-95

Participants: Moderator (M), Alex (A), Bob (B), Carl (C), Dirk (D), Earl (E), and Frank (F)

55 M: well you definitely don't see this at St. Lukes (.)

↑right

56 A: no

57 D: boys kissing maybe (.) but no (.) there are some gay boys

58 at St. Luke's =

59 B: = and there are some gay boys at Linntown

60 M: do they suffer at your schools (.) are they talked about

61 B: I don't think there are any openly gay boys at our school

62 D: uh yeah there are =

63 B: = well there's one there's one =

64 D: = actually I know a few of em (.) I mean I don't KNOW them but I've seen them =

65 B: = ↑how do you know they are gay

66 D: ↑how do I know they're gay

67 B: yeah

68 D: well he's an eleventh grade student the kid I know (.) I'm not gonna mention any

69 names (.) and well I'm in a class with mostly eleventh graders and there's this girl

70 who is very honest and who has a locker next to him (.) says he talks about how

71 he's gay a lot when she's there (.) not with her but um (.) but that's how I know (.)

72 AND HE associates with a lot of girls (.) not ANY boys (.) a few well a lot of the

73 boys at Linntown do that

74 M: why do you think that's the case (.) do you think there's a reason

75 F: maybe he's 'bi'

76 B: I don't think that's it (.) I think that maybe he just relates to them better =

77 M: = ↑is it safer

78 B: [oh yeah]

79 D: [yeah]

80 E: he doesn't have any male friends but he's got all these girls around him =

81 M: = but friends-friends or girlfriends

82 B: no no (.) not girlfriends but friends-friends like a friend that you go over to their

83 house on the weekend and watch =

84 A: = I think girls are more accepting of gays and lesbians =

85 M: = ↑than men

86 D: GENERALLY (.) only generally more =

87 B: = men are not that generally accepting =

88 D: = I am =

89 E: = it's mostly the top macho guys that aren't

90 M: so that:: is something (.) okay (1.0) is that something that you guys look up to

91 kind of a macho male (.) or is it the kind of softer male that is =

92 D: =(laughing, sticking out his chest) yeah I'm macho (.) no (.) but uh just

93 kidding >°it's actually the opposite for me°< uh macho

94 isn't it (.) I think (.) I think it's being popular cause I know a lot of kids that are

95 not macho and they are very popular

Of particular importance in this section is the rhetorical way Dirk displays knowledge about who is gay at his school. In Line 64, Dirk self-corrects ("I mean") and constructs a downgraded epistemic assessment to insist that although he knows of gay boys, he does not actually know them in a personal way. The downshift in epistemic hierarchy positions Dirk as potentially concerned about being seen as personally affiliated with homosexual boys. To offset the potential counter that he is displaying a bit of homophobia, he positions himself as protective and sensitive of the boys' identity by saying that he is not going to mention any names (Line 68).

The boys then start to talk about why gay boys seem to associate a lot with girls. It is here, in Lines 76-95, that the boys attempt to work up a view of a stereotypical homophobic male and then distance themselves from it. The boys jointly point out that gay boys have more female friends than male friends because girls are more accepting of gays and lesbians (Line 84). It is positioned as a "safe" (hearable as normal) response to the nonacceptance and homophobia that characterizes men in general. However, Dirk is very quick to point out that this nonacceptance is only true in general for men and that he is an exception (Line 88). Earl notes that it is mostly the "top macho" guys that are nonaccepting. The discursive strategy here involves doing differentiation, or claiming to be different from others who embody attitudes or behaviors that define membership in a nondesired group, like homophobic males. Such differentiation involves defining oneself negatively in contrastive "not us" terms (see Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995).

When asked if they identify with such macho males, Dirk parodies the image of being macho by sticking out his chest while saying "yeah I'm macho" (Line 92). When his caricature is not taken up in turn, he repairs the failed uptake with "No (.) but uh just kidding," and then lowers his voice as he says that he is actually the opposite of macho. On first glance, Dirk's quiet aside seems self-deprecating. However, when viewed as part of the project of differentiation, his aside functions not simply as a self-initiated put down, but, more importantly, it positions him as not macho—that is, as potentially tolerant, liberal, and sensitive. Ironically, it works as a self-compliment.

This is all done very carefully, with self-parody, laughter, and repair work—and its logic derives from the larger project of differentiation that is at play.

Section 4

Lines 96–113

Participants: Moderator (M), Alex (A), Bob (B), Carl (C), Dirk (D), Earl (E), and Frank (F)

- 96 M: alright well then let's say a best friend (.) you guys have best friends (.) ↑right
 97 D: [these] are our best friends
 98 B: [yeah]
 99 M: let's say your best friend one day (.) just imagine your best friend comes to you
 100 one day and confides in you (.) you know I think I'm gay (.) how would you feel
 101 (.) I mean seriously (.) how would you feel
 102 B: I'd be upset
 103 M: you know (.) whatever word you'd use (.) uh=
 104 B: = and I'd be very surprised=
 105 M: =surprised definitely (.) but how (.) how would that sit with you
 106 E: uhh:::
 107 C: I'd still be their friend=
 108 D: =I'd be in disbelief (.) but I wouldn't care that much=
 109 B: =you'd be in disbelief
 110 D: yeah I wouldn't be able to believe it (.) not after all the stories YOU'VE
 111 told me ((laughter, 2.0)) just kidding (.) just kidding Bob
 112 M: right (.) we are just imagining this stuff here=
 113 D: =yeah (.) just kidding

At Line 96, the moderator asks them specifically how they would personally feel if they found out that one of their best (male) friends was homosexual. Whereas Bob admits that he would be “upset” (Line 102) and “very surprised” (Line 104), Carl notes that he would “*still* be their friend.” The use of “still” could be heard as “even though they are gay.” Although the “still” is a simple modifier, it nevertheless works to differentiate Carl from Bob’s hearable non-acceptance. The simple modifier of “still” not only positions Carl as tolerant but also makes relevant that being gay might be grounds (for some guys) for ending a friendship, but for Carl it is not.

The brief exchange between Dirk and Bob in Lines 108–111 is also very revealing. Dirk admits that he would be in “disbelief” if he found out a close friend was gay, a position that indexes surprise but not necessarily nonacceptance. However, Dirk repairs it as if it might be heard as nonacceptance. After all, expressions of disbelief are often heard as mitigated forms of rejection or judgment (Speer & Potter, 2000). His follow-up of “but I wouldn’t care that much” (Line

108) works as a downgraded second assessment (see Pomerantz, 1984) that anticipates a negative response. It allows Dirk to position himself as nonchalant, casual, and indifferent. Displaying indifference is strategic. It insulates Dirk from the potential negative inference that his disbelief masks a hidden homophobia or silent contempt. As such, his disbelief has a strategic ambiguity to it, one that is neither obviously prejudiced nor obviously accepting (both being problematic positions), but rather one that is simply disinterested.

Bob’s rejoinder of “you’d be in disbelief” works to challenge and partly mock what can now be seen (at least by Bob) as Dirk backing down from his extreme knowing or tolerant position. Dirk’s comeback in Lines 110–111 is an interesting face-saving move. Designed as a joke, it positions his “disbelief” as being caused by Bob for leading Dirk to believe all along that Bob was heterosexual when he is actually homosexual. By doing this, Dirk is able to externalize the cause of his disbelief (and potential homophobia) onto Bob for being dishonest. However, because the joke works as a put-down of “closet” homosexuality, it positions Dirk as homophobic for telling it. This weakens the force of Dirk’s tolerant or indifferent position. Dirk ends up looking a bit homophobic, although it is at Bob’s expense. The key point is that in certain argumentative contexts like these, making a clever comeback or joke and thus digressing into homophobic territory may be worth it. It may secure a confident, witty, jocular, and heterosexual footing that is central in doing normative masculinity. However, after securing such footing, Dirk can work to equivocate back to his former position, as seen in his three attempts to remind Bob (and the others) that he is “just kidding.” Seen this way, homophobia is yet again traded on flexibly in moving between tolerant, indifferent, and normatively heterosexual masculine positions.

Section 5

Lines 114–147

Participants: Moderator (M), Alex (A), Bob (B), Carl (C), Dirk (D), Earl (E), and Frank (F)

- 114 M: okay guys (.) NOT your best friend but someone you are sitting next to in class
 115 (.) how would that cut into your relationship
 116 E: is this a friendship or someone else
 117 M: just someone you know (.) just someone you get along with (.) so it's not
 118 somebody you just don't care about at all but=
 119 B: =I'd probably be a little scared of him=
 120 D: =I wouldn't=
 121 B: =I honestly would=
 122 F: =I'd probably just I mean if they're gay I don't really care that they're gay cause

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- 123 if they are nice and all then that's okay (.) but uh
if they go after you and they're
124 like I like YOU (.) I'm gay then I'm just like (.)
I'll walk away and say go away
125 and just stay away from him
126 B: like if anyone in this room ever told me they
were gay (.) I wouldn't care at all=
127 E: =[YEAH BUT YOU] DO=
128 B: =[cause I'm already] >°such good friends
with them°<=
129 D: =(1.5) okay::: now that's (.) this is=
130 B: =well but if it was somebody I didn't know
well (.) then I probably wouldn't well
131 (1.0) I don't know (.) I'd have to see what hap-
pened (2.0)
132 D: I think this conversation bothers a few kids in
this room
133 E: like who Dirk
134 D: you
135 E: why me
136 D: I don't know
137 M: okay well that's interesting (.) then let's stop
(Moderator shifts topic and asks them about parents
and teachers.)

In this section, Bob admits yet again that he would have a less than embracing response to an acquaintance who admitted that they were gay. He notes that he "*honestly* would (be scared)." Such an admission of honesty positions Bob as unmotivated or uninterested in being dishonest or in parroting a fashionable or politically correct attitude. It counters the potential criticism that he is intentionally homophobic. By suggesting that his "scared" feelings are "honest," he can reposition his potential homophobia as honest candor, thus placing it in a more socially acceptable light.

Frank's reply (Lines 122–125) and what follows is slightly contentious. Frank begins with the "I don't really care" position of indifference that Dirk has already used several times ("I mean if they're gay, I don't really care that they're gay"). Frank then shifts to the use of disclaimers and conditionals, which are frequently used linguistic constructions for managing prejudice (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The first conditional works as a disclaimer, as he notes that "if *they* [a not-named entity, which displays disaffiliation] are nice and *all* then that's okay" (Line 123). The use of "all" is another extreme case formulation that upgrades the criteria for acceptability of homosexuals. The "but uh" marks the end of the disclaimer and the beginning of the potentially prejudiced claim. The second conditional is that if the homosexuals "go after" him, then he will "just" walk away and tell them to stay away from him. He insulates his response from appearing motivated by prejudice with

the use of "just" (Line 124). The "just" is a softener that marks his response as reasonable and nonextreme, as he declines the homosexual advance and just walks away. Although he is working to appear sensitive and nonhomophobic, he is also engaging in a distinctively masculine project of looking unaffected and nonchalant and thus in control and sure about his own sexuality.

The final few lines are rather dramatic. Bob makes a noticeable shift (Line 126) away from his previously stated position that he would be "upset," "surprised," and "scared" if he found out his friends were gay. In Line 126, he now says that he "wouldn't care at all." This shift in position is quickly challenged as Earl says "YEAH BUT YOU DO [care]!" (Line 127). Bob then softens his position by opening with the downgraded assessment of "well but if . . ." However, this softer version falls flat as he falters and admits, "well (1.0) I don't know (.) I'd have to see what happened." Bob's failure to counter Earl's challenge is followed by a pause, at which time Dirk takes on the role of moderator and looks at Earl and says, "I think this conversation bothers a few kids in this room." The move implies that there is perhaps something motivating Earl's strong remonstrance to Bob, thus baiting Earl to give an account. Instead, Earl plays dumb ("like who, Dirk?").

In this little exchange (Lines 132–136), we have one of the most pronounced demonstrations of sensitivity around the topic of one's feelings about homosexuality. Dirk and Earl both hedge around the vague and unstated thing that seems to bother Earl so much. Earl's final move is to suggest that this thing doesn't bother him, thus echoing the typically male-sounding, nonchalant, and unaffected position that the other boys have also adopted numerous times. We may never know whether something in particular was really bothering Earl. It does not really matter anyway. What matters is that having to account for looking homophobic, nonhomophobic, or bothered by homophobia matters to these boys—that managing positions of affiliation and disaffiliation to homosexuality are highly contested, locally constructed, and fluid projects that the boys work up to insulate their identities from appearing prejudiced while at the same time safeguarding a position of heteronormativity.

Discussion

The general aim in this analysis has been to extend what is known about homophobia and sexism by examining how homophobia and sexism are managed in talk. The specific goal has been to show that in local conversations between adolescent boys, homo-

phobia and sexism do not arrive on the discursive scene with prepackaged meanings, such that the boys simply tell us what they think, feel, and believe about them as normative aspects of masculine ideology. Homophobia and sexism are not easily identified prior to an analysis of actual instances. Instead, they are given meanings within the ebb and flow of interaction, meanings that are often very dilemmatic, equivocal, and sometimes contradictory. The boys reveal that talk about homophobia is not a simple emptying out of their attitudes or feelings, but rather a carefully managed project of accounting for themselves as masculine young men. In the data examined, the boys used a range of positioning strategies, such as requests for clarification, suppression, the use of softeners and extreme case formulations, differentiation, displays of indifference, disclaimers, and conditionals, to name a few. The value in a discursive analysis is that it reveals that it is precisely these positioning devices, and the strategic ways in which they work to preempt and deflect possible counters, that matter the most for constructing nonprejudiced forms of normative masculinity.

A discursive methodology allows us to see what it is that the boys themselves find problematic or prejudicial about homophobia and sexism and how they use those meanings to build and resist their own and others' masculinities. This ushers in a new type of psychology, one that provides a more elaborate account of the complexity of masculine norms and of the conversational processes of taking up and managing those norms. It takes us far beyond the straightforward notion of conformity and nonconformity to preestablished questionnaire items. A discursive approach to talk in interaction illuminates the actual and often dilemmatic production of conformity and nonconformity in practice.

As noted earlier, this encourages a rather complex analysis of how men conform and resist heteronormative masculinity. It resonates strongly with critical-minded psychologists and feminist-inspired sociologists (Connell, 1995; Johnson & Meinhof, 1997; Kimmel, 1987; D. H. J. Morgan, 1990), as well as gender socialization researchers (Eckert, 1998; MacCoby, 1998; Thorne, 1993) who have repeatedly pushed for a fuller understanding of gender relations. It aligns with discussions about how new forms of homophobia and sexism are often the result of mixing complicity with resistance. Such contributions have provided provocative insights into how participants manage prejudice by paradoxically emphasizing egalitarian or liberal values. The paradox is that as the boys become more adept at resisting obvious

and old-fashioned forms of prejudice, the better they become at normalizing the prejudices of more liberal, new-man forms of masculinity. Thwarting political correctness, biting one's tongue, and looking nonchalant or indifferent about homosexuality are strategies that are especially illustrative of new methods for indirectly doing prejudice.

At first glance, such positioning strategies seem to promote a liberal, open, and egalitarian attitude. If scored on a Likert scale, the boys talk might have ended up looking somewhat tolerant or open minded, or at the very least nonprejudiced. However, when analyzed within the sequential arrangement of turns, their displays of indifference or suppression can be seen to be both resistant and complicit with hegemonic masculinity. Although the boys do work to resist looking prejudiced, they also work to safeguard the traditional masculine values of appearing confident, secure, and knowing about what is at stake in displaying their views. As Wetherell and Edley (1999) have noted, one of the more subtle ways for young men to reclaim the control and autonomy associated with hegemonic masculinity is to not simply appear unaffected by homosexuality but to also flout the social expectation that they will adhere to politically correct thoughts and practices. Benwell (2002) has referred to this type of masculinity as "new laddism," which involves a rejection of the feminist-friendly new man for a more traditional form of masculinity that flouts political correctness and flaunts an almost shameless spirit of openness and lack of hypocrisy.

Managing new laddism means negotiating an ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988)—the tension between acquiescing to a shallow conformity to fashionable norms (political correctness) and working to avoid the perception that one's forthrightness, honesty, humor, or clear preference for heterosexuality somehow portrays one as homophobic or sexist. The boys' management of such a dilemma is in many ways consonant with the crisis in masculinity that looms over the broader cultural context of gender relations. Young men are encouraged to be independent, confident, and secure in their masculinity while simultaneously being advised to reform or abandon their oppressive habits, to be more open and tolerant, and to practice sensitivity and compassion. The dilemma, however, is not so much one of balancing preestablished cultural norms but is rather a lived ideological dilemma—a dilemma that is repeatedly constructed and managed within local conversations. By investigating conversational positioning, the foregoing analysis has attempted to detail several aspects

of the lived or practical ideological tensions that face young men. I have attempted to analyze a range of positioning devices that are available for young men for managing the dilemmas associated with homophobia and sexism.

Limitations

From a positivist or postpositivist tradition, the most obvious shortcoming of the analysis is that it relies too heavily on too little data to satisfy the traditional cadre of positivistic criteria, such as validity, reliability, and generalization. I cannot claim that the analyses mirror what is objectively going on, nor can I argue that they necessarily confirm a priori hypotheses. Rather, discursive work is both an inductive and purely epistemological project that remains mute as to the ontological veracity of its findings (see Edwards & Potter, 1992). Also, from a positivist tradition, the methods are not reliable. Because discourse analysis is not a straightforward recipe but rather a craft skill, analyses will inevitably differ in interesting but significant ways. Finally, the small amount of data prevents traditional generalization. To approximate this, one would need to code a larger amount of the data and then count it in some way.

There are several ways to think about these limitations. The first is to make very clear that this study is firmly couched within a qualitative discursive paradigm that is strongly associated with the social rather than physical sciences and with work in critical theory, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. These traditions eschew a correspondence view of truth, a belief in value-free or objective knowledge, and any pursuit of generalization that obviates a commitment to close and critical particularization. Instead, a qualitative discursive paradigm argues for a view of knowledge that is partial, situated (rather than universal), particular, and relative to the researcher's interpretive system, methods, and values.

Another way of responding to these limitations is to consider the value of focusing in depth on small samples, or what qualitative researchers call "purposive sampling" of information-rich cases (see Patton, 2002). The most obvious benefit, for both qualitative and quantitative work, is that purposive sampling is suited for answering research questions concerned with detailing processes. An interest in the subtle and indirect positioning strategies that young men use to inoculate against prejudice while engaging in heteronormative masculinity calls for a detailed analysis of relatively small and purposive samples rather than data that are coded, quantified, or ethnographically summarized. The question of the present work was

not "how often," nor was it about developing a typology of different inoculating strategies. Although those are interesting questions that are (admittedly) not pursued here, they would require a broader analysis that would necessarily skim the details of both the data and how the analysis was conducted for a broad compendium of frequency counts and summaries of general trends.

The value of doing a discursive analysis of a small sample is that it empirically details the complexity involved in appropriating and resisting masculine norms. Psychologists who are more comfortable with quantitative approaches could design studies around such insights. For instance, empirical studies could be developed to investigate the factors (or social environments) associated with men using certain inoculating devices or positioning strategies, such as biting their tongues or displays of indifference. One could also imagine therapists or educators using such insights to challenge the indirect ways that hegemonic masculinity is discursively established and maintained. Far from being a limitation, the type of analysis offered here could generate a glut of interesting questions and hypothesis aimed at exploring the complexity involved in managing normative masculinity.

Conclusion

To conclude, the present analysis has aimed to partly call into question the use of normative, broadly defined definitions (transplanted as items on questionnaires) of what counts as homophobia or sexism. Although these quantifiable definitions are undoubtedly useful for identifying and challenging more stereotypical forms of prejudice, I believe they are unhelpful for understanding the mundane, everyday ways that most men manage the complexities involved in mitigating prejudice while orienting to normative masculinity. The more standard psychological measures tend to systematically parse out and ignore the rhetorical processes used to display sensitivity and guardedness in discourse. A more discourse-analytic framework enables social science researchers to account for the dexterity that men display in shifting from antihomophobic to homophobic positions, often within the same turn or two of conversation. It also takes seriously the social constructionist insight that it is in the commonness of multiple and conflicting conversational positions that homophobia and sexism are indirectly kept alive. A DP approach is designed specifically to empirically examine this insight. In taking this seriously, educators, clinicians, and parents would be better equipped to not only understand the lived ideological management of mas-

