

‘IT’S A METROSEXUAL THING’:  
A DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL  
EXAMINATION OF MASCULINITIES

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Matthew Hall

# Abstract

The recent critical focus on men and masculinities purports challenges to the dominance of ‘hegemonic’ or idealised dominant masculine scripts (Connell, 1995). Men’s increasing consumption of image enhancement products and especially facial cosmetics – aspects of so-called ‘metrosexuality’ (Simpson, 1994, 2002) – constitute one such example. Scholars have predominately examined ‘metrosexuality’ from sociological perspectives (Carniel, 2009; Coad, 2008; Miller, 2008) arguing it challenges gender and sexuality through an interest in feminised practices, but also by unhinging it from gender and sexuality as an asexual personal aesthetic lifestyle. Given that we know little of how self-identifying ‘metrosexuals’ define, construct and negotiate their identity in relation to other gender and sexual identities, these absences underpin this thesis. The wealth of Internet computer-mediated forms of communications provide fruitful datasets as newly forming identities like ‘metrosexual’ are arguably more easily claimed online in the absence of face-to-face interaction. This thesis examines four modes of electronic talk – an online magazine article and reader responses, forum contributions, video creator and viewer responses, marketing testimonials - with discursive psychological (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and membership categorisation analytical (Sacks, 1992) approaches. The analysis of the talk pays particular attention to the discursive features deployed in the construction of ‘metrosexual’ masculinity by both ‘metrosexuals’ and ‘non-metrosexuals’. The analysis also highlights the continued availability of, and difficulty in rejecting, conventional masculine scripts; men frequently reference sexual prowess, self-respect, corrective measures to combat the effects of extreme work and sport, whilst rejecting some features of conventional masculinity as outdated. This thesis shows

how masculinity remains a multifaceted resource, which can be creatively deployed to fulfill various functions – to embrace contemporary social demands – making the study of ‘metrosexual’ masculinity an important and novel contribution to knowledge.

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# Introduction

Today, as never before in the UK, there are a the plethora of men's grooming and image enhancing products available on the high-street and online, ranging from shaving-related products (razors, gels, creams, oils, balms), to scalp-hair products (styling gels and sprays, shampoos, conditioners, hair growth products, epilators), body and non-beard facial products (epilate methods - waxing, electrolysis, tweezing, threading, sugaring, laser hair removal), body tanning and artwork, skincare products (facial and body moisturisers, anti-aging and fatigue creams and gels), cosmetics (manscara, guyliner, face powder, blusher, lip gloss, illuminator), self and specialist teeth-whitening, to cosmetic surgery procedures including major (rhinoplasty, rhytidectomy) minor (mole, tattoo, and cyst excision), the self-administrable (Botox, chicken pills, Hydrogel) and 'lunch-time' procedures (laser-liposuction) to name only a few.

If the variety of men's grooming and image enhancing products is a marker of men's interest in appearance, it should be no surprise to learn that the UK market (excluding cosmetic surgery procedures) has enjoyed a steady 4-6% growth rate year-on-year for the past decade or so - currently worth nearly £600 million in the UK (Mintel, 2012) with predictions for it to reach approximately £1 billion by 2016 (L'Oréal, 2010; Mintel, 2012; Superdrug, 2010). This trend appears to be recession-proof, with one in three men continuing to spend more than £10 per week on these products with 75-85% of men claiming that personal appearance is a key priority, citing anti-ageing, employment progression, social circles and sexual attractiveness as reasons (L'Oréal, 2010; Mintel, 2012; Superdrug, 2010). Indeed, the UK's second largest health and beauty retail chain Superdrug claim that men are now dedicating

'83 minutes of every day to their personal grooming - which includes cleansing, toning and moisturising, shaving, styling hair and choosing clothes' - apparently some 4 minutes longer than the average woman's daily beauty regime (Superdrug, 2010). Where shaving products, bar soap and shampoo were the main items men once cited as grooming items they could not live without, only shampoo remains, with the others being superseded by artificial tanners and sun protectors (67% and 65% respectively; L'Oréal, 2010). Moreover, Mintel market research (2012) reports that skincare products and specifically facial moisturisers and other facial skin revitalising products are now fast eclipsing shaving products as the number one items found in a man's bathroom cabinet.

As one might expect, the biggest consumers of grooming products are those aged 18-24. Although there is a slight drift in usage in the 25-55 year age ranges, consumption patterns remain fairly constant. It is only the over 55s that begin to reduce general consumption, with hair colouring products bucking the trend (Mintel, 2012). Research on minority ethnic group consumption patterns in the UK appears sparse, although one would expect the data to be similar given these trends are not confined to the UK. Predictably, the more developed nations of European, North America and Australasia have experienced similar growth patterns, even in the current climate of low levels of economic growth (Economist, 2012; Euromonitor, 2012). The growth trend for men's grooming products is also evident in the faster growing BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China), where growth rates for men's grooming products are more than double economic growth – the Chinese men's grooming market grew a record 20% in 2012 (Euromonitor, 2012). In other parts of the world too, the market for these products grew e.g. Pakistan, Kenya, South Africa, Morocco, Mexico and so on (Euromonitor, 2012). Even with cultural

differences, manufacturers of skincare products enjoyed some of the best market growth. For example, Nivea moisturising lotions have grown so rapidly they are now challenging the market giant Gillette (Euromonitor, 2012). However, where there does appear to be some difference, at present, is the growth in the consumption of men's cosmetics in European, North American and Australasian nations in relation to rest of the world.

Men's facial cosmetics are often considered the more-extreme end of the male grooming spectrum given the strong traditional association of colour cosmetics with women and femininity (Harrison, 2008). Yet in the last decade or so, major international names such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Yves Saint Laurent, Clinique, Menaji, KenMen, Makeup Artist Cosmetics, Illamasqua and 4VOO, along with lower priced alternatives such as Taxi Cosmetics, all developed cosmetics specifically for men ranging from pen-shaped illuminators, lip serums and protectors, shine reduction powders with compact and dry puff, lipstick-shaped concealers, eyelash and brow glazes with mascara wand, shape and shine nail sets, eyeliner pens, face bronzers, to tinted shimmer and self tanners. Although the sales of men's cosmetics are growing at twice the rate of women's, the market size still remains only a fraction of the size of the women's colour cosmetics market (L'Oreal UK, 2010 p. 3). But what this new development, and the overall trend in men's grooming points to, is the blurring of traditional gender-discrete activities in levels of grooming and image enhancement.

Men's increasing interest in grooming and image enhancement is, of course, nothing new and can be traced back to the Dandies and Marconies of the Victorian era and indeed, beyond. However, it was then practiced only by the few and largely by the wealthy (Osgerby, 2003). Although in more modern times consumption patterns began to change, men's grooming remained 'relatively invisible to due to

societal perceptions of ‘a ‘feminine’ realm of consumption and a ‘masculine’ realm of production’ (Osgerby, 2003, p. 59). It was not until the 1980s when visibility began to change and consumption began to be ‘redefined as an activity that is suitable for men – rather than simply a passive and feminised activity’ (Moore, 1989, p. 179). Various explanations have been put forward to account for this shift, crediting fashion and image influences from the gay movement (Simpson, 1994, 2002), equality pressures from feminist movements (Collier, 1992), marketers seeking new avenues in late capitalist consumer societies (Featherstone, 1991) and the advent of the style press confronting men on a daily basis with stylised images of other men’s bodies (celebrity actors and models) linked to advertisements for men’s products (Gill, 2005).

Such changes did not go unnoticed. The columnist Mark Simpson in a 1994 article in British daily newspaper *The Independent* entitled ‘Here come the mirror men’ and in his book *Male Impersonators* published in the same year observed:

Nineties man, it almost goes without saying, exhibits no bashfulness about gazing at his own reflection – ask any girl who has been locked out of the bathroom by her preening brother. Nor is this self-regarding something that he keeps private. He is to be seen parading in front of mirrors in High Street clothes shops and examining his new haircut in the salon mirror with the kind of absorbed concentration that his fathers might have reserved for the football results. In fitness studios and gymnasias, meanwhile, he pets, pampers and provokes his reflection in full-length wall-mirrors into a shape he finds more appealing.

When not in front of the mirror you will find him at the chemist,

stocking up on goods designed to prolong and heighten the ecstasy of his union with his reflection in the bathroom mirror. Shaving equipment (electric, cut-throat and disposable) and accessories (foams, gels, crèmes, pre- and post-shave balms, aftershaves and colognes); hair products (shampoos, conditioners, sealants, hot oils, gels, mouse, pomade); soaps (medicated, hypoallergenic, vitamin-E added) and cleansers, astringents, moisturizers, anti-wrinkle crème, eye-gel, deodorant (perfumed and unperfumed, aerosol, stick, gel and ball), toothpaste, teeth whitener, dental floss, and even make-up. All clearly and proudly labeled ‘for men’ or ‘pour homme’, just in case someone should be so old-fashioned as to mistake these for *feminine* products (1994, p. 95).

The conclusion Simpson eventually drew was that these changes in men’s grooming and image enhancing practices meant that a, ‘new, narcissistic, media-saturated, self-conscious kind of masculinity’ had emerged – so called ‘metrosexuality’ (2004, p. 1).

Although I had on occasion come across this modern ‘buzzword’ I was uncertain of its meaning, yet I was acutely aware that my own image consciousness was different to my forefathers and that grooming practices were a key element of this. Like others around me, I saw these personal changes as part of wider developments in gender equality, but not necessarily in masculinity. It was only whilst exploring gender transgressions in my postgraduate dissertation did all these elements collide to bring questions of masculinity to the forefront of my mind. And so, whether ‘metrosexual’ masculinity does indeed constitute a ‘new’, changing or emergent masculinity in the UK or other English speaking nations, and if so, in what

way(s), is the focus of this thesis. To this end the thesis is structured in the following way:

I begin by examining mediated understandings of ‘metrosexual masculinity’, relating definitions to Simpson’s initial and more contemporary outing. In doing so I flush out the mediated issues surrounding this new identity. To understand the significance of these I explore masculinity beginning with a discussion of dominant, idealised or ‘hegemonic’ masculinity, followed by some of the work academics have contributed to exploring men’s experiences in other non-normative masculine behaviour and activities. Having examined some of the issues and experiences men face in non-traditional settings and activities, I move on to examine what previous academic studies tell us about ‘metrosexuality’. I specifically focus on highlighting the gaps in what we currently know about this phenomenon and what this thesis can contribute to that debate. Given that most of these studies were sociological in scope, I argue in the following data and methodology chapter, the value of a discourse analysis approach, which focuses on online electronic texts by both self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ and ‘non-metrosexuals’. I examine four separate but interrelated studies of different online data sources by discursive means. These studies have subsequently been published in *The Journal of Gender Studies*, *Gender and Language*, *The Journal of Men’s Studies* and *Psychology & Marketing* respectively.

Study one ‘Don’t you want to know if you’re “metro” too?: Magazine and reader constructions of ‘metrosexuality’ and masculinity’ begins by examining how metrosexuality is discussed in the media. It does so by examining an online article discussing metrosexuality accompanied by a range of reader responses showing ‘metrosexual’ identity boundary work and some of the issues associated with what is considered transgressive behaviour. Study two ‘Any other metrosexuals in here?’:

Constructing metrosexuality and masculinities in an online forum' continues this focus, but adds the more specific dimension of self-identified 'metrosexuals' identity work on candidate activities and behaviours. Study three 'I'm METRO, NOT gay!': men's accounts of makeup use on You Tube' takes this one step further focusing on a self-identified 'metrosexual's' online video of his daily facial cosmetics regime. The analysis of this study centres on how the video creator and other 'metrosexuals' masculinise these activities. Staying with facial cosmetics, study four 'We want to look our best without appearing flamboyant': Stake management in men's online cosmetics testimonials' examines how men manage stake in using these typically feminised items and how these are deployed by marketers.

Although the focus on these studies is similar, they are different in scope and so individual conclusions are drawn at the end of each chapter. However, the dominant themes or overlapping issues are examined in the final chapter, commenting also on the scope and limits of the thesis and whether 'metrosexuality' does indeed constitute a new or emerging masculinity. In doing so I show how this thesis contributes to our understanding and knowledge of men and masculinities.



# 1. Masculinities

## ‘Metrosexuality’ In The Media

Mark Simpson, credited with first coining the term ‘metrosexual’ in a 1994 article in *The Independent* (November 15) entitled ‘Here come the mirror men’, defined a typical one as:

...a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that’s where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference. Particular professions, such as modelling, waiting tables, media, pop music and, nowadays, sport, seem to attract them but, truth be told, like male vanity products and herpes, they’re pretty much everywhere (Simpson, 1994).

What’s interesting to note about this definition is that sexuality is deemed irrelevant ‘He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial’. The key component however, is narcissism ‘he has clearly taken himself as his own love object’ displayed through consumption ‘money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis – because that’s where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are’ and visibility ‘professions, such as modelling, waiting tables, media, pop music and, nowadays, sport, seem to attract them’. Although this definition was

coined nearly twenty year ago, it still fits well with the statistics presented previously in the Introduction. For example, the average man is reported to be spending four minutes more than women on his daily grooming regime, claiming that personal appearance is a key priority, citing anti-ageing, employment progression, social circles and sexual attractiveness as reasons (L'Oréal, 2010; Mintel, 2012; Superdrug, 2010). Yet what is interesting is that the 'metrosexual' has now taken on other meanings. Below are three definitions, one from the number one online men's style magazine AskMen.com, a well-known online market analyst organisation - Euromonitor International, and given the 'metrosexual' has now reached the English lexicon - the Oxford English Dictionary Online.

Askmen.com (Brennan, 2007):

...a modern, usually single man in touch with himself and his feminine side; grooms and buffs his head and body, which he drapes in fashionable clothing both at work or before hitting an evening hotspot; has discretionary income to stay up to date with the latest hairstyles, the newest threads, and the right shaped shoes; confuses some guys when it comes to his sexuality; makes these same guys jealous of his success with the ladies—for many metros, to interact with women is to flirt; impresses the women who enjoy his company with the details that make the man; Such as: his appreciation for literature, cinema, or other arts; his flair for cooking; his savoir faire in choosing the perfect wine and music; his eye for interior design; is a city boy or, if living a commute away from downtown, is still urbane, if not rightly urban; enjoys reading men's magazines...'

([http://uk.askmen.com/daily/austin\\_100/102\\_fashion\\_style.html](http://uk.askmen.com/daily/austin_100/102_fashion_style.html))

Euromonitor International (2010):

Metrosexual, essentially the heterosexual male with an unashamed interest in shopping, fashion, fitness and personal grooming. In one way Metrosexual is the development of an aspect of the macho man often referred to as the 'peacock male', where the determinedly masculine male aggressively shows off his fine plumage to attract females and intimidate rival males. However, the Metrosexual is a more sophisticated variant, with the preening but without the aggression and with an implied acceptance of alternative lifestyles  
(<http://www.marketresearchworld.net/content/view/1056/77/>)

Oxford English Dictionary Online (2012):

a heterosexual urban man who enjoys shopping, fashion, and similar interests traditionally associated with women or homosexual men  
([www.oed.com/view/Entry/263156?redirectedFrom=metrosexual#eid](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/263156?redirectedFrom=metrosexual#eid))

Apart from the recognition of narcissism displayed through consumption and visibility pointed out in Simposn's (1994) original definition, the 'metrosexual' now has three additional characteristics – sophistication, femininity and heterosexuality. Euromonitor (2010) define sophistication as a 'development' of outdated heteronormative masculinities centering on sexual competitiveness and aggression, whereas 'the Metrosexual is a more sophisticated variant, with the preening but

without the aggression and with an implied acceptance of alternative lifestyles'. AskMen.com (2010) on the other hand define sophistication as a man's 'appreciation for literature, cinema, or other arts; his flair for cooking; his savoir faire in choosing the perfect wine and music; his eye for interior design'. In both definitions, sophistication is seen as rejecting and challenging conventional notions of discrete gender activities. Perhaps this is why links to femininity are drawn, 'a modern, usually single man in touch with himself and his feminine side' (AskMen.com, 2010). These aspects and the need to affirm heterosexuality 'a heterosexual urban man who enjoys shopping, fashion, and similar interests traditionally associated with women or homosexual men' (OED, 2012) suggests trouble. That is, as the dictionary definition points out, men doing activities typically associated with 'women or homosexual men'.

Simpson alluded to these later in a 2002 *Salon* article titled 'Meet The Metrosexual' where he decided to 'out' a few of the high profile celebrity 'metrosexuals' such as the footballer David Beckham and actors Tobey Maguire in the film *Spiderman* and Brad Pitt in the film *Fight Club*. Although the bulk of Simpson's commentary concerning Maguire and Pitt centered on their on-screen characters, their off-screen activities also mirrored those of Beckham. According to Simpson (2002), Beckham was, and probably still is, the 'biggest metrosexual in Britain because he loves being looked at and because so many men and women love to look at him'. One only needs to take a glimpse at a photo of him (see below) to see what Simpson meant - attractive, well groomed, stylish, trendy, comfortable in front of the camera, appearing to enjoy himself.



David Beckham (2002, February 7). 'Police' Sunglasses Launch.

However, one of the key reasons why Beckham was given the 'metrosexual' number one spot was that, according to Simpson, he allowed himself to be exploited by marketers for vanity, status and financial gain. As Simpson amusingly puts it 'he sucks corporate cock with no gag reflex' (2002, p. 1). Of course what the Beckham marketing phenomenon also did was give men permission to be looked at, which challenged conventional notions of looking where men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at (Berger, 1972). Tobey Maguire and his *Spiderman* character Peter Parker however, are 'outed' by Simpson for subverting traditional heterosexual masculine values. That is, choosing one's own image before the girl. Simpson's take on the film suggests that 'we're supposed to believe that Tobey is motivated by old-fashioned virtues of social concern' but when 'Kirsten finally offers

herself, Tobey declines, realising that she would come between him and his real love: his metrosexual alter ego in the Day-Glo gimp suit' (2002, p. 1).



Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) - *Spiderman* (Arad et al., 2002).

This commentary seems at odds with the common understanding of 'metrosexual' presented in the three definitions - image conscious activities are undertaken for heterosexual pay off and not rejection. But as we see in Simpson's original observations, sexuality is immaterial to image consciousness in the respect that image consciousness cuts across all sexualities. Regardless of Simpson's position, men's image consciousness has proved socially unsettling as the OED (2012) point out 'metrosexual' activities and behaviours are associated with those of 'women or homosexual men'. Simpson (2002) indirectly alludes to this perspective when

commenting on Brad Pitt's character in *Fight Club*. This film apparently offers a dose of homoerotica. That is, men admiring each other – tough, lean, muscular bodies – but in the context of the men's locker room.



Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) – *Fight Club* (Linsen et al., 1999).

The problematic issue underlying heterosexual men's naked bodies and image-consciousness is that it invites, not only attention from women but also from other men - the homoerotic gaze (Cole, 2000). In other words, it unsettles conventional notions of gender looking (Berger, 1972). Such changes have been spurred on by media representations of men, which have contributed to the increasing visibility of men's bodies (Gill et al., 2005). Where once female bodies dominated style magazines, newspapers and televisions, men's bodies are now just as likely to feature. The launch of men's lifestyle magazines in the 1980s (e.g. GQ) and other mass market men's publications (e.g. Men's Health), along with billboard images e.g.

actor Djimon Hounsou donning his underwear on the side of the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Hong Kong (Calvin Klein, 2008), have helped to firmly establish the presence of the men's bodies as objects to be eroticised and consumed (Gill et al., 2005). The greater visibility of men's bodies has led some men at least to 're-evaluate their appearance, re-position themselves as consumers of fashion and style products, and ultimately reconstruct their idea of what it is to be male' (Harrison, 2008, p. 56).

Moore (1989) and Cole (2000) suggest the eroticization of men and men's bodies became more evident in the 1980s through television adverts such as the famous Levi's 'Launderette' advert flaunting Nick Kamen's semi-naked body, which increasingly invited heterosexual men to view gay-inspired images. On a similar note to Berger (1972), Simpson (2004, p. 2) suggests that the commercial initiatives in pursuit of new markets for beautification products had 'queered' decades of conventional masculinity because it placed men and men's bodies center stage. This 'queering' of the male gaze unsettles traditional heteronormative masculinity in opening up a space in which to raise questions of gender and sexuality identity, as Simpson points out in *Fight Club*. That is, challenge traditional conceptions of heterosexuality and associated behaviours (e.g. modes of looking) as 'normal' and these as gender discrete.

As expected this unsettling of traditional gender and sexuality scripts caught the attention of other media pundits. For example, *The Daily Mail* (July 25, 2008) featured the article by Natalie Trombetta: 'Ronaldo vs. Becks: Who is the biggest metrosexual of them all?' questioning whether the original iconic metrosexual David Beckham had now been superseded by Cristiano Ronaldo, another superstar footballer. Gender difficulties are implied by the satirical comparison of Beckham's and Ronaldo's fashion and grooming choices culminating in asking the sexuality



loaded question ‘who is the queen of preen?’ *The Times* has also covered the external health and image advantages of being ‘metrosexual’ in an article entitled ‘Is this the face of the new metrosexual?’ (March 21, 2010). Apparently Jeremy Langmead, the editor of *Esquire* ‘has such a healthy youthful glow that people actually compliment him on it as he walks down the street’. When asked what his secret was, he was reported to have said ‘the rigours of his toilet regime, from daily cleansers and anti-wrinkle serums down to under-eye rejuvenators and lip balms’. But what was also reported as accompanying these upshots was his discomfort felt in transgressing into a feminine domain of image consciousness. Such difficulties have been seized on in several coaching manuals *The Metrosexual Guide* (2003) and *The Hedonism Handbook* (2004) are provided by Nicholas Flocker, along with Peter Hyman’s (2004) *The Reluctant Metrosexual: Dispatches from an Almost Hip Life*. These coaching manuals attempt to minimise men’s anxieties by providing guidance on the use of products not only labeled ‘for men’ or ‘pour homme’, but also unisex products and how to avoid using these in ‘feminine’ ways.

‘Metrosexuality’ in the media does not only center on the ‘how to do’ or ‘how to avoid’. The concerns surrounding gender and sexuality mean that ‘metrosexuality’ has been deployed as a term of abuse, satire, political and self-ridicule to name a few. For example, the *New York Times* (Blow, May 18, 2012) ran an article mocking President Barack Obama in the run up to the presidential elections ‘The metrosexual black Abe Lincoln has emerged as a hyper-partisan, hyper-liberal, elitist politician with more than a bit of the trimmer in him.’ Arnold Schwarzenegger on the other hand gently ridiculed himself in an article entitled ‘Is Arnold Schwarzenegger metrosexual?’ in the *International Herald Tribune* (Dowd, September 26, 2003) by reporting a self-confessed shoe fetish. Mockery and ridicule has interestingly been

used by Anders Behring Breivik - the infamous Norwegian self-confessed mass-murderer – in his defense. *The Telegraph* ran an article ‘Anders Behring Breivik a self-styled 'metrosexual' who used David Beckham as an example’ (Orange, May 29, 2012) in which one aspect of his defense centers on claims that friends thought he might be ‘homosexual because he was feminine and fastidious about his appearance...he used make-up powder, those kinds of things, and he explained that as being 'metrosexual’.

Yet even with the difficulties indicated with the term ‘metrosexuality’, it is a marker of its popularity and its ubiquitousness. Indeed, this is evidenced with approximately 800,000 academic and non-academic articles online and 1.3 million Google hits – up 1% annually since I started my doctorate in 2008. Even with such evident popularity, some claim that the ‘metrosexual’ is in decline or simply passé. For example, in 2005 Salzman et al. claimed in their book *The Future of Men* that the ‘übersexual’ was replacing the ‘metrosexual’, because the ‘metrosexual’ had been too self-indulgent, overly fashion-conscious and narcissistic. In other words, these men’s practices were becoming too much like those associated with women and femininity. The übersexual however, was able to improve on this by mixing modern non-feminine consumption practices (e.g. sticking to conventional masculine fashion styles and the use of shave-related products), along with the modern demands of gender equality interspersed with traditional masculine traits. That is (2005, p. 167):

M-ness’ i.e. ‘a type of masculinity...that combines the best of traditional manliness (strength, honor, character) with positive traits of traditionally associated with females (nurturance, communicativeness, cooperation)...

Others media pundits such as *The Daily Mail* columnist Tanya Gold (April 13, 2009) focus on the ‘metrosexual’s’ apparent physical structure in an article entitled ‘Goodbye skinny metrosexuals, the beefcake is back’. In it she says:

Everywhere I look big, dark, hairy, slightly fat men are staring at me - from advertising billboards, cinema screens and the pages of glossy magazines. They growl, they glower, they exude menace and demonic sex appeal. I wonder, could it be - could it really be - that the beefcake is back?

*The Times* also ran a feature by Andrew Billen called ‘Metrosexual R.I.P.?’ (April 7, 2006) wondering whether the metrosexual was now dead in the wake of the recent closure of Conde Nast men’s shopping magazine *Cargo* – presumed to be ‘the’ metrosexual magazine. Yet the apparent wealth of material discussing the ‘metrosexual’ suggests a continued fascination with the phenomenon. Indeed, as Simpson (May 13, 2006) points out in his rebuttal of Billen’s and others' claims ‘The metrosexual isn’t dead, he’s just power-napping on the sunbed’. That is, the ‘trend’s not dead – just dead common’. What he argues is that the majority of men continue to have self-presentation regimes, which extend beyond the basic hygiene practices of their forefathers. The increasing consumption of these, challenges traditional notions of feminine/masculine behaviours and practices regardless of one’s sexuality. Therefore, according to Simpson (September 6, 2011) it’s pointless the press writing obituaries. How many (Simpson, 2011):

...will the press write for the metrosexual before they finally accept that he's immortal? Or at least, undead? That every time they cut off his head and pronounce him 'deceased' they replace him with even more metrosexuality? (<http://www.marksimpson.com/blog/2011/09/06/the-metrosexual-is-undead/>)

Whether the 'metrosexual' is living on borrowed time or not, it is without doubt that gender trouble has been awakened by the phenomenon. Therefore, there is still analytical mileage in studying how men manage their masculinities when participating non-typical gendered behaviour in relation to more conventional notions of masculinity. It is these conventional masculine scripts and what we currently know about them, which I now turn to examine.

## **Conventional Masculinities**

Given the continued popularity and centrality of 'hegemonic masculinity' in a sizeable amount of contemporary studies of men and masculinities, it seems fitting to begin here. The concept was introduced nearly three decades ago by Kessler et al. (1982) to explain power relationships between men and women and between different men. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) they described how gender relations and practices subordinate women by men and marginalize and subordinate other men (e.g. effeminate men and homosexuals). Connell (1995, p. 77), developing the concept further, described it as not a single mode of masculine behavior but rather is a variety of masculine identities amassed around expectations

of what masculinity is presumed to be. Hegemonic masculinity is seen as a normative masculinity, which is the current most honored way of being a man in a given context, even though most men do not enact it. However, all men are required to position themselves in relation to dominant or hegemonic forms, which can also be deployed to legitimate the subordination of women and marginalised men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

Such notions of are often displayed in the media through characters such as Dominic Toretto played by Vin Diesel in the film *Fast And The Furious* (2001) or Del Spooner played by Will Smith in *iRobot*. (2004).



Dominic Toretto (Vin Diesel) – *Fast And The Furious* (Moritz & Cohen, 2001).



Del Spooner (Will Smith) – *iRobot* (Shane et al., 2004)

Both male characters Dominic Toretto and Del Spooner have strikingly similar attributes such as being lean and muscular, technically savvy, competitive, emotionally stoic and pain resilient, tough, fearless, skilled with cars and weapons and desirable to women, indicating heterosexuality. Such attributes even extend to aging Hollywood stars such as Clint Eastwood in *Trouble with the Curve* (Eastwood et al., 2013), Arnold Schwarzenegger in *The Last Stand* (di Bonaventura et al., 2013) and Sylvester Stallone in *Bullet To The Head* (Gough & Hill, 2013), suggesting that such notions of masculinity cut across generations – at least in films.

Accordingly, hegemonic masculine attributes, are not then upheld by force, rather they achieve dominance by means of persuasion and are sustained through the institutions of culture - film, television, books, magazines, Internet and so on

(Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In order to remain dominant, other masculinities and femininity must be kept subordinate (Connell, 1995, p. 77). It is easy to see then why the ‘metrosexual’, or any other newly forming masculine identities such as SNAG, renaissance man, primp, Martha studly, skexual, gastrosexual, übersexual (see Appendix 1 for definitions and other identity labels), are frequently dismissed as inconsequential, ridiculed, claimed as ridiculous, ignored, challenged, abused, considered passé or dead (Billen, 2006; Gold, 2009).

Yet hegemonic masculinity remains in essence a ‘hybrid term’ (Miller, 1998, p. 194–5) because, although there are many candidate masculine attributes it is difficult to state precisely which ones are hegemonic. In other words it is not an archetype. Rather, it ‘occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable’ (Connell 1995, p. 76). This point has been subject to much critical review (see Anderson, 2011, 2012; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Demetriou, 2001; Donaldson, 1993; Hearn, 1996; MacInnes, 2001; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). In particular Wetherell and Edley (1999, p. 337) question the, ‘appropriateness of a definition of dominant masculinity which no man may actually ever embody’. What Wetherell and Edley (1999) allude to is the difficulty in stating exactly what hegemonic masculinity looks like. Instead the term seems more akin to describing a social process of subordination and stratification, as Anderson (2005) points out.

This supports observations that masculinity is ‘never a static or a finished product’, but rather, is something, which is constructed in specific situations for specific purposes (Messerschmidt, 1993, p. 31). However, although hegemonic masculinity is a slippery term, it doesn’t mean that it has doesn’t still have analytical mileage given that notions of hegemonic masculinity continue to be constructed and

circulated in the media (e.g. Dominic Toretto and Del Spooner). The presence of such images as representing hegemonic masculinity provides a benchmark for men in which to men position their own masculinity. Of course, as other researchers have demonstrated (Anderson, 2011, 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2010) some men reject these candidate hegemonic masculine characteristics in favor of a more ‘inclusive’ masculinity brought about by changing cultural pressures, prevailing social trends and the immediate requirements of the moment. This doesn’t mean men have an absolute free hand when it comes to constructing their masculinities. For example, it would be difficult to imagine many men getting away with wearing a dress and high-heels to the office if they suddenly wished without some form of negative repercussion – unless for a charity event or similar. Yet many men may choose a softer form of masculinity in the company of their partner or mother than perhaps with their friends at a football game or at the local pub; indicating a level of agency as Messerschmidt (1993) points out.

If we retain the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a benchmark or positioning marker for men in which to men position their own masculinity and viewing masculinity as something to be constructed on a moment-to-moment basis, we can examine how men such as ‘metrosexuals’ manage their non-normative gender activities and what hegemonic masculine features they drawn upon to account for their transgressive behaviours. Previous scholarship has followed a similar perspective when examining how men do masculinity and manage their identity in other feminised environments; many of these are location specific such as work (Simpson, 2005; Williams, 1993), college (Anderson, 2005) or cyberspace – illness support groups (Seymour-Smith, 2002), and some like Gough’s (2007) study of men’s food choices are practicable almost anywhere. It is these studies, and others,



that I now turn to.

## **Men In Feminine-Type Environments**

Examining men in non-typical gendered spaces and activities has been the focus of various analysts (Coyle & Morgan-Sykes, 1998; Gill et al., 2005; Gough, 2006, 2007; Gough & Edwards, 1998; Harrison, 2008; Seymour-Smith et al., 2002, 2010; Wetherell & Edley, 1998, 1999; Willott & Griffin, 1997). Given that ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1995) centers on dominance and submission of women and homosexual men, previous research (e.g. Messner 1992; Sargent 2001) has implied that men exert more dominant masculine traits in typically feminised environments and whilst doing non-typical masculine activities in an attempt to bolster their status and deflect charges of effeminacy; these include the expression of homophobia, devaluing femininity, claiming a masculine space within the larger feminised area, or heightening masculine bravado (Anderson, 2005, p. 339).

Yet many men do not express homophobic and anti-feminine attitudes as Anderson’s (2005) study of male college cheerleaders points out. He found that roughly 50% of his 68 interviewees conformed to so-called ‘orthodox’ masculinity by devaluing women and gay men. However, the other half of the interviewees aspired instead to what he terms ‘inclusive’ masculinity. That is, more willing to ‘embrace the feminized underpinnings of their sport and largely value their gay teammates’ (2005, p. 338). Aspiring to ‘inclusive’ masculinity however did not mean that these men didn’t perform more dominant forms of masculinity. As Anderson points out, heterosexual male cheerleaders ‘emphasize that certain tasks within cheerleading (such as lifting women above their heads) are masculine, believing women lack the strength to perform these tasks as well as men’ (2005, p. 339). On

the other hand they abstained from certain types of dance (e.g. erotic) as these were considered exclusively feminine. The framing of practices as masculine or feminine in line with more dominant or hegemonic notions of masculinity (and emphasized femininity) have been observed with men in other feminised settings.

Men in less masculine gender-type occupations such as nursing, primary school teaching, hairdressing (Simpson; 2005) secretarial work, care giving, and stripping (Williams, 1993) are frequently thought of as less masculine, reporting experiences of abuse and challenges to their sexual orientation and ‘manliness’ (Simpson 2005, p. 366-376). Interviews with these men report men reclaiming masculinity by citing skill acquisition, progression into management, employment specialism (e.g. male nurses working in accident and emergency or mental health) or through managing sports teams (2005, p. 373). In other words, reframing their identity with more conventional masculine or ‘orthodox’ markers.

In self-help groups too, some men expressed more dominant notions of masculinity as guiding principles for conduct and attitudes. For example, Seymour-Smith’s (2010) study of men attending a cancer sufferer’s self-help group identified feminised associations with such groups e.g. they were more akin to women’s coffee mornings or mother’s meetings. In light of such associations, her male interviewees tended to either express ambivalence to the meetings or reframe their attendance as heroic ‘concerned with saving lives and stopping people dying of cancer’ (2010, p. 105).

Perhaps more expectedly in the realm of online beauty products, advertisers and men were found to masculinise these feminine-type products. Harrison’s (2008) visual semiotic analysis of male mascara advertising on the Internet found that advertisers were reframing mascara in masculine ways (‘manscara’; ‘guy-liner’) in

order to distinguish it from women's mascara. Even in the daily routine of food consumption dominant masculinities exert their influence. Gough (2007) examined various UK mass-market newspaper representations of men and diet and identified enduring discursive constructions of men as disinterested in healthy eating, with a supposed preference for bulk and red meat-based dinners. Even those articles, which featured men sampling new cooking and eating practices were seen to deploy masculinised metaphors (e.g. hunting and gathering) and to reject nutritional advice.

These studies and others (De Visser, 2008; Hill, 2006; Hunter, 1993; Humphreys, 1972) clearly indicate that some men position themselves within discourses and practices typically associated with women and femininity, but continue to draw on dominant or hegemonic masculine norms. So despite the difficulties surrounding the concept of hegemonic masculinity, it would seem that it is still relevant in helping us to understand how men manage their masculinities in the realm of traditional feminised activities such as image enhancement. However the extent to which, masculine identities such as 'metrosexual' are positioned in relation to hegemonic norms, or whether it is transforming them remains an important question. The next section examines what other academic studies of 'metrosexuality' tell us about this.

## **'Metrosexuality' In Focus**

Given the apparent media interest in 'metrosexuality', surprisingly few academics have engaged directly with the phenomenon of the 'metrosexual'. One reason seems to be that some scholars (e.g. Harris & Clayton, 2007a, 2007b) easily dismiss 'metrosexuality' as a media and market generated term. That is, the media and

marketers have constructed the term to attract new audiences and consumers, rather than it actually representing a new brand of masculinity (Harris & Clayton, 2007b, p. 152). What lends support to this view is that the gloves are off when it comes to defining 'metrosexuality's' boundaries; demonstrable with the definitions presented earlier in this chapter. On a similar note, scholars such as Schugart (2008) argue that 'metrosexuality', is the engendering of commercial masculinity. That is, reconciling 'commercial masculinity with normative masculinity by organising homosociality in strategic ways' with what appears to be the simple objective of increasing sales and opening up new markets (2008, p. 280). In her opinion, 'metrosexuality' is but a moment in popular historical culture.

Recent preliminary research by de Casanova at the University of Cincinnati suggests this moment could be over. She interviewed 22 mostly white men, 24-58 years old, living in New York, Cincinnati and San Francisco with jobs in sales/marketing, finance, recruitment and architecture/design. Her presentation 'Is the Metrosexual Extinct? Men, Dress, and Looking Good In Corporate America' of her initial findings at the 2012 American Anthropological Association conference suggests 'what the term describes is alive and well, especially in matters sartorial, the descriptor itself is passé' (Fuller, 2012). In other words, men's image conscious practices haven't changed, but rather, 'hipster' is the new category label (see Appendix for a definition). This smacks of Salzman et al.'s claim in 'The future of Men' (2005) that the 'metrosexual' was being replaced by the 'übersexual'. Given the current persistence of the term 'metrosexual', only time will tell whether de Casanova is right.

Regardless of the strength of the term as currency, other scholars (Carniel, 2009; Coad, 2008; Harrison, 2008; Miller; 2006, 2009) suggest that 'metrosexuality'

does seem to represent changes in masculinities. Miller's (2006, 2009) studies of the trends in men's consumption practices in the US suggests that the advent of 'metrosexuality' has been brought about by a political-economic shift in the labour market, one in which employers have commodified the male body. He notes that:

...the middle-class U.S. labor market now sees wage discrimination by beauty among men as well as among women, and major corporations frequently require executives to tailor their body shapes to the company ethos, or at least encourage employees to cut their weight in order to reduce health care costs to the employer (2006, p. 113).

Such trends seem to cut across generations effecting both young and older employees. He notes that the consumption of hair-colouring and hair-loss products, along with moisturizers, getting pedicure, facials and even cosmetic surgery has increased over recent decades by modern middle-aged men in order to avoid the 'silver ceiling'. That is; occupational discrimination due to the effects of ageing. Apparently grey haired and un-groomed men are perceived as, 'less successful, intelligent, and athletic' (Miller, 2006, p. 113). However, Miller (2006, 2009) points out that it is perhaps too early to suggest that this represents any permanent change in masculinities since there is evidence of a 'backlash' favouring more conventional forms of masculinity in the form of the übersexual who is sophisticated yet smokes cigars and is tough (2006, p. 115).

Coad (2008) on the other hand suggests that these shifts are more permanent. His book *The Metrosexual: Gender, Sexuality and Sport* argues that the marketing of

high profile sports celebrities such as international footballer David Beckham and Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe are responsible for encouraging heterosexual men to ‘engage in practices stereotypically associated with femininity and homosexuality, such as care for appearance and the latest fashion trends’ (2009, p. 73). However, he goes one step further by arguing that ‘metrosexuality’ is important for our understanding of gender and sexuality because it challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Because beautification and self-care have been conventionally associated with gay men and women, heterosexual ‘metrosexuality’ represents a move beyond the constrictive bipolar categorizations masculine/feminine and hetero/homo. In Coad’s (2008, p. 197) words:

Metrosexuality is based on the idea that power can be shared between the sexes, rather than be exclusively seen as a sign of virility or naturally pertaining to the male sex. Metrosexuality means that passivity can be shared by men and women rather than confused with femininity. It also implies a destigmatization of homosexuality and a consequent decrease of homophobia, since metrosexuality is blind to sexual orientation and privileges no single sexual identity. As well, the fact that metrosexuality can replace conventional categories of sexual orientation means that less attention is being paid to traditional binary opposition separating males into two discrete categories, heterosexual or homosexual.

Given this perspective it would seem then that ‘metrosexuality’ masculinity does represent a significant change in masculinity as many men now feel compelled to re-evaluate their idea of what it is to be male. Yet Carniel’s (2009) study of

‘metrosexuality’ and Australian soccer found that although men were now more image-conscious, spurred on by the consumption practices of sporting celebrities, masculinities were in effect hybridizations of existing masculinities. Carniel (2009, p. 81) argues that ‘While metrosexuality re-socializes men as consumers, it does not necessarily alter other fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity’ (see Connell, 1995) because existing discourses of masculinity which favour heterosexuality, strength, violence, risk taking and so on are still readily available and frequently drawn upon.

Carniel’s observations support findings in Harrison’s (2008) multimodal reading of an online advertisement for male mascara - *Real men do wear mascara: advertising discourse and masculine identity*. She noted that advertisers and marketers of men’s cosmetics reframed these typically feminised products with more conventional masculine markers in order to give men permission to consume them. For example, men’s makeup is:

...considered ‘corrective,’ that is, as addressing a health concern rather than a beauty issue. Also, much of the discourse about the products attempts to validate their use through scientific terminology. Thus, Velocity Moisturizer Emulsion, a facial cream, is ‘vitamin-enriched’ with the capacity to ‘stabilize skin’s natural defences . . . while special humectants attract and hold additional moisture for hours (Harrison, 2008, p. 61).

Harrison focused on how marketers visually reframe typically feminised products, such as mascara and eyeliner, in more conventional masculine ways e.g. symbolising

them as phallic and renaming them as ‘manscara’ or ‘guyliner’. These studies indicate the difficulties some men find in participating in typically feminised practices and using products associated with those. They highlight also that conventional or ‘hegemonic’ masculinities still seemingly influence some men to reframe these feminised activities in more conventional masculine ways. Since we know nothing about communities of self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ and how metrosexuality as a social category is defined and produced through social interaction within group-based contexts, this research explores how men who directly engage with, negotiate and renegotiate their metrosexual identities, do so in the presence of non-metrosexuals and women in online community based contexts. Given the reported continued influence of conventional or ‘hegemonic’ masculinities one may expect difficulties for those identifying with ‘metrosexuality’. Therefore, I intend to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do men self-identify with, disavow and negotiate metrosexuality?
- 2) How is ‘metrosexuality’ defined as a category and what are the essential characteristics and practices of membership?
- 3) How is ‘metrosexuality’ presented in reference to other gender and sexual identities?
- 4) To what extent does ‘metrosexuality’ challenge more conventional forms of masculinity or constitute a new masculine identity?



However, before moving on to analyse my datasets to identify answers to these questions it is the discussion of appropriate data and methodologies for studying such occurrences that I now turn to.

## 2. Data and Methods

### Online Texts

Two key aspects of ‘metrosexuality’ so far identified are men’s consumption in general and their specific consumption of image enhancement products; demand for which is fuelled by marketing campaigns and mediated discussion. As the media seem to play an increasingly important part in shaping and defining Western culture, it follows then, that the media would play an important role in providing a space to help define, represent and influence men and masculinities (Craig, 1992, p. 3). Given the increasing amount of time spent on a daily basis accessing online applications – almost half our waking day (OFCOM, 2010) - via TVs; smart phones, laptops and other communication devices, it’s logical that the Internet would be a rich source for accessing information and discussions about ‘metrosexuality’ both by self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ and ‘non-metrosexuals’.

The Internet provides almost instantaneous and universal access to various online sources of information such as news feeds and live imaging, tweets on Twitter, Facebook posts, online articles, blogs and many more. These opportunities afforded by the compression of time and space, allow users to react and respond differently than with offline face-to-face interaction. Since as the user is not physically present in cyberspace it is easier to withdraw from problematic situations; exiting an online session requires a minimum of turning the computer off (Turkle, 1997). The Internet is also routinely associated with freedom of expression and so new forms of identity and self-expression are able to thrive along with the creation of new alternative online communities (Babchishin et al., 2011; Hargitta, 2008). Hearn (2006, p. 950)

directs us to the positive and negative outcomes of interactions in cyberspace, which do not require the revealing of participants' biographical status or situational cues, which include sexual crimes such as grooming underage girls. Another problem with not having to reveal one's identity is that inflammatory, and unaccountable, statements can be made more easily. 'Trolling' is one such example. An article in the UK newspaper *The Guardian* entitled 'Limmy's Show: Confessions of an Internet troll' explains how 'trolls' find fun in irritating, upsetting, annoying and generally ruining people's day (Limond, November 9, 2012).

Yet, notwithstanding these negative aspects, the Internet does offer a space for the expression of new forms of identity such as the 'metrosexual' less easily claimed offline and arguably ridiculed and marginalised in offline society for gender non-normativity. New identities may be more easily claimed online without face-to-face interaction and by providing the support of other geographically dispersed members of the same community (Fraser, 2010). DeHaan et al.'s (2012) study of electronic communities identified the additional community benefits of increasing self-esteem, respect, status, knowledge and information sharing. Online spaces such as social networking sites, discussion forums, chat rooms and so on provide opportunities for studying and interrogating the construction, negotiation and currency of newly forming masculinities and how these are achieved in relation to other gender and sexual identities.

Yet studying online masculinities is still a relatively new and underdeveloped field. Some analysts (Epstein, 2007; Wiszniewski & Coyne, 2002) argue that online identities are unreliable for study, since there is a greater potential for creating a 'mask' (Wiszniewski & Coyne, 2002). Such views presume it is much easier to create alternative identities in the absence of face-to-face visual and verbal cues as

noted with ‘trolling’, but also online dating as Epstein, (2007) points out. Yet what underlies such views is an implicit assumption about ‘truth’. That is, the true nature of the person’s identity.

On the other hand some researchers (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam 2003; Coyle & MacWhannell 2002) show how in computer-mediated communication the same ‘real’ offline identities are created in online communications by relying on the same references to space, embodiment, time and shared experiences. For example, research on suicide forums (Horne & Wiggins, 2009), eating disorders (Blomquist et al., 2011) and sexual abuse (Babchishin et al., 2011) all showed similarities to offline identity construction via the disclosure of shared experiences, knowledge, meanings and positions with those who have membership entitlement within the same electronic space. Given the Internet also offers the potential of a greater freedom of expression (Hargitta, 2008) and the availability of a wealth of research opportunities afforded by computer-mediated communication channels - blogs, chat rooms, forums, MUDs (multi-user-domains), email, bulletin boards, video sites, audio sites, text chat, social networking, instant messaging and so on – online sources became logical options for examining ‘metrosexual talk.

Stepping aside from such debates on ‘real’ identities, I focus instead on the social processes, actions and discourses people routinely draw on to make sense of their interactions with others; for example, the features of ‘normal’ sexed people, which are presented as objective, factual and transsituational (Zimmerman, 1992). In other words, how people work up their gender and sexual identities to make them appear normal and fixed. As previously mentioned, a simple ‘Google’ search generated 1.3 million hits and 800,000 academic and non-academic online articles. Narrowing the search scope to ‘metrosexual talk’ only reduced the number of hits by

half a million. Focusing specifically on English discursive material and open access sites allowed me to omit foreign language online forms of communication along with specific modes such as MUDs, email, text chat and audio, and some social networking sites such as Academia.edu and parts of Facebook and so on. The remaining sites were sifted for length of duration (e.g. how old and how long the thread had been running) and number of posts. Threads with only two or three posts were deleted, as was talk from specific anti-metrosexual groups (e.g. Facebook: I Hate metrosexual douchebags, 2010), online 'metrosexual' testing sites, women finding metrosexuals 'hot' or 'repulsive' and commercial 'metrosexual' guides. Those remaining 50 or so threads were categorised by mode of computer-mediated communication and then by the following criteria:

1. *Social, media and 'metrosexual' talk* - The objective was to examine a media source with a general discussion on 'metrosexuality', which had multiple and diverse reader responses (e.g. wo/men, hetero/homo, metro/non-metro). The aim of analysing both the media representation of metrosexual masculinity and the way in which readers' negotiate and contest this identity was to identify what such exchanges tell us about people's relationship to discourses circulating within the media.
2. Self-identified '*metrosexual' talk* - The objective was to examine the boundary work needed to establish a distinction between 'metrosexuality' and other masculine identities, but also the negotiation of candidate metrosexual-bound activities and predicates with an eye on the various discursive strategies employed.

3. *'Metrosexual' attribute talk* - The objective was to examine metrosexual talk about a more extreme aspect of metrosexuality with the aim of analysing how the individual and respondents design their talk and manage their account of this activity, paying attention to the strategies deployed to manage gender and sexual identities more generally.
  
4. *Marketing and metrosexual talk* – Given metrosexuality appears inextricably linked to consumption, the objective was to examine marketing-based metrosexual talk about a more extreme metrosexual activity with an eye on the ways these men are managing their interest.

The specificity of the criteria whittled threads discussing *Social, media and 'metrosexual' talk* down to eight threads spanning online men's magazines and newspaper articles. Of those remaining eight the Askmen.com 'Are you metrosexual?' article and thread provided the necessary range of diverse responses to offer a more balanced analysis of social perspectives on the 'metrosexual' phenomenon. Similarly, of the eleven threads of self-identified *'metrosexual' talk* only three offered a range of diverse 'metrosexual' responses. However, only the MacRumours forum thread 'Metrosexuals?' provided the length (how long the thread had been running e.g. day, months, years), depth (numerous responses from each of the participants), clarity of discussion (variety of topics discussed e.g. 'metrosexual' markers such as clothes, grooming modes and makeup), a sustained attention to the matter at hand (the intensity of discussions on specific topics spanning several hours, days or months), richness in detail (what constitutes and means to be 'metrosexual' rather than simply 'I am') and diversity of 'metrosexual' perspectives (e.g.

‘Manchester metrosexual’). On the theme of ‘*Metrosexual*’ attribute talk twenty or so YouTube threads covering various ‘metrosexual’ activities such as ‘manscaping’ (modes of body hair removal) and ‘fashion’ provided ample datasets. However, I took the decision to focus on the more extreme ‘metrosexual’ activity of makeup use (Harrison, 2008) as this I suspected would be harder to justify than fashion or body hair removal (e.g. cleanliness or to enhance muscle definition). Given a man’s daily makeup routine is non-typical I wasn’t surprised to find only one YouTube thread ‘Makeup for men’ and responses. Although other threads exist where men can be seen applying makeup these are either ‘mocking metrosexuals’ or by makeup artists demonstrating ‘how to’ for fancy dress parties or other theatrical events. In keeping with the extreme ‘metrosexual’ activity focus, the final criteria *Marketing and metrosexual talk* surprisingly produced only two marketing testimonial sites by the seven main men’s cosmetics. Of those two only 4VOO’s ‘It’s a metrosexual thing’ cosmetic testimonials had more than three testimonials. Indeed, 4VOO’s ‘It’s a metrosexual thing’ numbered 64 although the three-quarters of these were celebrity endorsements. These four threads are those I analyse in the remainder of thesis. Each dataset or extract is produced in full, with spelling mistakes, emoticons and vernaculars, albeit with the addition of line numbers for ease of analysis and as a reference point to the text.

## **Methods of Analysis**

Having clarified my data selection methods and criteria, along with a fuller understanding of mediated masculinities presented in the previous Chapter, I now consider theses in relation to appropriate methodologies for studying these

phenomenon and datasets. Given that my interest is focusing on how identities are worked up during electronic talk, this naturally results in singling out discursive methodologies as relevant for the purpose of these four studies that form the foundation of this thesis. However, there are several other discursive methodologies available (e.g. Critical Discourse Analysis, Foucauldian Analysis), but in the following sections I outline why Discursive Psychology (DP hereafter) (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA hereafter) (Sacks, 1992) specifically, are suitable methodologies. I begin this process by exploring their underpinnings.

## **Ethnomethodology**

Harold Garfinkel's (1967) renowned work *Studies in Ethnomethodology* was principally the development of a methodology for studying social life, informed by the phenomenological ideas of Husserl and Schutz (and later with existential phenomenology e.g. Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty). Constitutive phenomenology<sup>1</sup> as propounded by Husserl (1913), ignored previous philosophical concerns with the causes of social phenomena instead seeking to understand how people collectively construct meaning from their experiences of social phenomena. In

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<sup>1</sup> A subsequent development from his earlier 'realistic phenomenology' in *Logische Untersuchungen* of 1900-1901. There appear to have been five phases in the development of phenomenology. The first, 'realistic phenomenology', searched for the universal essences of human actions and seems to have occurred shortly after Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*. The second phase 'constitutive phenomenology' began to appear in print in 1913 and looked at reflections of phenomenological methodology. The third phase 'existential phenomenology' (including Heidegger etc) was an extension of phenomenology's focus to include topics such as action, conflict, desire, finitude, oppression, and death. A fourth phase 'hermeneutical phenomenology' began about the 1960s, focusing on textual interpretation, but also extended to issues such as ecology, ethnicity and gender.



other words, the collective meanings people create. These are necessarily intersubjective, since they are co-created from people's interactions with each other in experiencing the world. Therefore meanings are rooted in peoples' actions and words. People perceive their experiences of the social world as orderly and intelligible since they are composed of the combined corresponding activities of people. In other words, people are not passive receivers of their experiences, but rather, the interpreters of their world in which they act upon. Although there are a multiplicity of ways of interpreting events in the social world, people are able to understand how others are defining the world from what they do. In essence, people read the behaviour of others for what it tells them about how others understand a situation and so act on the basis of those readings. On the basis of this, people produce their own orderliness out of their own and others actions.

Schutz (1967) took Husserl's phenomenology and directed it to the task of informing social research endeavour. It was Schutz's work, which had the greatest influence on Garfinkel's work. Schutz argued that social research differs from research conducted by the natural sciences (e.g. chemistry, physics) because the researcher is unable to enjoy the separateness from the object of study – as in the positivistic tradition<sup>2</sup>. Instead the ontological status of the social researcher is one of being part of the social world that is to be interpreted. The social researcher who focuses on aspects of the social world (e.g. social interaction) should therefore, develop consistent, adequate and meaningful interpretations that relate to the common-sense understandings people use to experience the social world. Schutz (1967) argued that the methods people use, and ones, which social researchers should

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<sup>2</sup> Positivism has six main tenets – 'naturalism', 'phenomenalism', 'nominalism', 'atomism', 'scientific laws' and 'facts/values'. For a detailed explanation of these see Comte (1971).

relate their interpretations to, are created through a process of continual typification. That is, the everyday social actions, interactions and behaviours that people experience are identified, classified and assigned by them to a specific type or category of action or interaction.

Garfinkel (1967) deployed Schutz's<sup>3</sup> philosophical position to his own research to develop the methodological apparatus of 'ethnomethodology' for use in understanding the social processes and social actions that are routinely produced from the orderly and intelligible interactions of people. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, focused on Agnes, a 19-year-old male-to-female transsexual, with the aim of identifying the identity features that 'normal' sexed people take for granted. Thus Garfinkel wanted to understand normally sexed persons achieve sex category membership in various circumstances and contexts, yet their actions appear as objective, factual and transsituational (Zimmerman, 1992). In short, Agnes' management of her feminine identity, or 'passing', implied that people view the world as 'populated by two sexes and only two sexes, 'male' and 'female'' (1967, p. 122) with fairly clear notions of what it means to be a member of either sex, such that both fe/males have sex distinct insignia and properties. For example, fe/males have specific genital configuration and 'appropriate feelings, activities, membership obligations, and the like' (1967, p. 123). The existence of such norms meant that Agnes' accomplishment of gender required (1967, p. 134):

...securing and guaranteeing for herself the ascribed rights and obligations of an adult female by the acquisition and use of skills and

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<sup>3</sup> Garfinkel was also influenced by Talcott Parsons' sociological position of an orderly society in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937)

capacities, the efficacious display of female appearances and performances, and the mobilising of appropriate feelings and purposes.

Ergo, Garfinkel was able to produce a list of the properties that constituted people as ‘natural, normally sexed persons’ (see Garfinkel, 1967, p. 122-123 for the complete list). Accordingly, he was able to develop a methodology that allows for the observation of, ‘*how* normal sexuality is accomplished through witnessable displays of talk and conduct’ (1967, p. 180). In short, ethnomethodological enquiry reports on the ‘apparent concreteness’ of social phenomena as it is understood by members of society, which they draw upon to maintain a sense of meaning and existence in social life even though ‘concreteness’ does not actually exist in itself (Garfinkel, 1991, p. 10-19). These social ‘facts’ Garfinkel argued can be observed and studied through available data on talk and action.

Garfinkel’s work has been subject to criticism (Bologh, 1992; Denzin, 1990; Goldthorpe, 1973; Rogers, 1992), such that ethnomethodology cannot tell us anything very important (e.g. big political and social issues) as its main concern is with how we constitute this world, rather than what we constitute it as being. In this respect, it is argued that although people’s interactions produce a social reality, some outcomes of the interaction may not be intended for some of the participants and some of the interactional content will remain independent of the actors that created it. Goldthorpe (1973, p. 456) argues that ‘a law, a regulation, a customary practice, a point of etiquette as an ‘intelligible’ even when it is in no one’s mind’. Therefore as objective content exists outside of people’s interactions, even though it originated through people’s interactions, they are still valid and of some interest for social researchers to study. Furthermore, Goldthorpe (1973, p. 457) argues that the physical

world and objective content continue to interact and influence the intersubjective world that people co-create in their interaction. Goldthorpe and others therefore call for the continuation of ontological pluralism in social research. Their argument is a compelling one, but is unable to dismiss the usefulness of a methodology of social action that provides an understanding the social processes and social actions that are routinely produced from the orderly and intelligible interactions of people. It is this latter point that has kept ethnomethodology influential in psychological enquiry (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; West & Zimmerman, 2002) and specifically Discursive Psychology (Potter & Edwards, 1988) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (Sacks, 1992).

## **Discursive Psychology**

Discursive psychologists (DP hereafter) (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005; 2007) are interested in reworking a whole range of issues that traditional psychology has studied such as memory and attribution (Edwards & Potter, 1992); emotions (Edwards, 1998) beliefs, attitudes and evaluations (Billig, 1992; Puchta & Potter 2004; Wiggins & Potter, 2003), accountability and versions of reality (e.g. Potter, 1996; Wooffitt, 1992), gender and sexuality (Clarke et al., 2004; Speer & Potter, 2000; Stokoe & Smithson, 2001) and so on. These issues are reworked from the position of the Discursive Action Model (DAM; Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.154):

### *Action*

- 1 The focus is on action, not cognition.
- 2 Remembering and attribution become, operationally, reportings (and accounts, descriptions, formulations, versions and so on) and the inferences that they make available.
- 3 Reportings are situated in activity sequences such as those involving invitation refusals, blamings and defences.

### *Fact and interest*

- 4 There is a dilemma of stake or interest, which is often managed by doing attribution via reports.
- 5 Reports are therefore constructed/displayed *as* factual by way of a variety of discursive techniques.
- 6 Reports are rhetorically organized to undermine alternatives.

### *Accountability*

- 7 Reports attend to the agency and accountability in the reported events.
- 8 Reports attend to the accountability of the current speaker's action, including those done in reporting.
- 9 The latter two concerns are often related, such that 7 is deployed for 8, and 8 is deployed for 7.

What is clear from this DAM is that the focus is on how versions of 'reality' such as identities get done in online (and offline) settings during discursive interaction (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2005, 2007). In other words, reality isn't something that is

fixed, rather people produce versions of reality at any given time for specific purposes, and so these versions of reality are dependent of whom one is interacting with, the purpose and context of the interaction, along with prevailing social and cultural discourse. It is easy to comprehend how wo/men may work up particular notions of femininity/masculinity in relation to settings and whom they are interacting with. For example, I might work up a more dominant notion of masculinity whilst out walking in the hills or on the moors with a bunch of male friends than I would perhaps if I was to attend some form of therapy session. Analysts (Clarke et al., 2004; Speer & Potter, 2000; Stokoe & Smithson, 2001) working from a DP position have shown how different notions of gender and sexuality can be constructed for the purpose of upgrading or downgrading people's status. For example, the term 'boy' can be used to downgrade a man's status when deployed with 'give a boy a man's job and he'll mess it up every time', but upgrade status in 'out on the tiles with the boys' (see Gough & Edwards, 2008 for the deployment of similar gender terms).

Of course, gender and sexuality can be worked up, referenced and implied in many other ways during the course of interaction. For example, this can be seen in the way talk:

...displays how people define and pursue...topics, how they are deployed and resolved, how they are argued, claimed and avoided and how they are formulated within conversational activities such as assigning or avoiding or mitigating blame (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 15).

Besides these and other functions of talk, discursive interaction is also sequential, relational and contextual. The importance of these is that the design and organization of people's talk is not produced in isolation but is related to previous events and accounts and relevant to a particular context. This means that a number of things are in play during talk at any given time. For example, talk about men's grooming would necessarily be produced in relation to a) the perspective at that moment of the person giving the account (pro-, indifferent, anti-), b) the perspective at that moment of the hearer (pro-, indifferent, anti-), c) the place in which the talk occurs (lecturer theatre; chat in the street) d) it's relation to a previous sequence of talk (previous discussion; comments; news thread; print article) e) dominant discourse circulating in the local community and this at the national or international level (Wiggins & Potter, 2013, p. 84).

Although DP allows us to see these in talk-in-action, analysts need to be mindful of over analysing the text and drawing on their own knowledge of social norms and expectations. Edwards and Potter (1992) argue therefore, that to avoid analyst-lead interpretations of real-world phenomena, analysts should instead read the interactions, that is only what is made relevant, of the participants involved. This later point is one of the major differences DP and MCA have with other discursive methodologies (e.g. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Foucauldian Analysis). Where discursive methodologies such as CDA (Fairclough, 2001, p.229-266) and Foucauldian Analysis (Foucault, 1980) become interpretative commentaries is when they attempt to make links between what emerges from a micro-analysis and the macro-issues such as the operation of power, ideology, and persuasion. What DP and MCA argue is that macro-structures can only be commented on if the participants in the interaction make it relevant. If not then it is simply an analyst commentary.

In order to reduce the possibility of analyst-led interpretations of real-world phenomenon, DP focuses on naturally occurring talk in situated interaction; people's discursive practices in everyday (e.g. a chat with friends) and institutional (e.g. at an interview) settings. Online computer-mediated communication channels are also forms of everyday (e.g. chat rooms) and institutional (e.g. professional body websites) talk and so appropriate sites for collecting naturally occurring data. However, unlike the collection of offline data, via audio recording, and transcribed using Jefferson's (1984) conversation analytic notations, no transcription is required with online data as the electronic text is ready for immediate examination. Favouring naturally occurring talk, DP avoids the researcher's/analyst's influence on data collection and data analysis phases in interviews, questionnaires, surveys and focus groups (Potter & Hepburn, 2005), which is in mainstream psychological enquiry. Therefore the following eight issues concerning data collection and analysis are avoided:

- 1 The setting for data collection is set-up by the researcher.
- 2 The researcher plays an active role in collecting the data.
- 3 Data collection is an interactional production.
- 4 Analytic assumptions tend to be tied to specific elements of the data.
- 5 Data collection is flooded with social science categories, assumptions and research agendas.
- 6 The footing of researcher and participant(s) varies.
- 7 Both the researcher and participant(s) orientate to stake and interest.



8 There tends to be presuppositions about cognition, individual assumptions and human actors.

What is evident is that interview, questionnaire, survey and focus group data collection is artificial. Such that, data collection and analysis is determined by a pre-defined agenda, which influences how participant(s) respond. By collecting naturally occurring talk DP is able to avoid eliciting expected responses, or the working-up of identities, accounts, descriptions and so on by both interviewer and interviewee. Having set out the Discursive Action Model from which DP analyses talk and highlighted the benefits of collecting naturally occurring data I now move on to discuss Membership Categorisation Analysis which also analyses talk-in-action albeit with a different focus.

## **Membership Categorisation Analysis**

Following the ethnomethodological position that meaning is co-created during people's interactions with each other, Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA hereafter) (Sacks, 1967, 1972, 1979, 1992 and subsequently extended by Hester & Eglin, 1997; Jayyusi, 1984; Sharrock, 1974; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2010; Watson, 1978 and many others) is able to look how category meanings are worked up, deployed and negotiated during people's talk. Therefore, MCA specifically focus on 'the organization of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk' (Francis & Hester, 2004, p. 21). Put simply, masculine categories such as 'man', 'boy', 'dude', 'father',

and others are ‘inference rich’, carrying large amounts of culturally rich common-sense social knowledge. These categories are able to tell us something about the identity of the categorised. For example ‘father’ references a male, typically over 18, who has a biological or adopted child, or indeed is a church leader and considers his congregation his children.

Such social knowledge is not only available from the category itself, but also observable in how people go about identifying others, their realities, social orders, their social relationships with others and how they judge (Jayyusi, 1984). Being able to see these aspects in talk means that talk can be treated as ‘culture-in-action’ (Hester & Eglin, 1997). Sacks pointed out that there are rules and procedures regarding categories. For example, categories are either personal membership categories - classifications or social types that may be used to describe people (runner, accountant), their actions (running, accounting) and characteristics (fit, good with numbers) – and non-personal categories - used to describe objects (chairs, doors) and non-tangible elements (laws, societies). Those that fall into the non-personal categories often display similar organization features as those of personal membership categories e.g. organisable into membership categorization devices (Hester & Elgin, 1997; Jayyusi, 1984; McHoul & Watson, 1984). Membership categorization devices are:

...any collection of membership categories, containing at least a category, which may be applied to some population containing at least a member, so as to provide, by use of some rules of application, for pairing of at least a population member and a categorization device member (Sacks, 1974, p. 218).

MCDs comprise of two parts. The first part, is that one or more categories form a collection. Collections of categories (MCD) are ones that go-together and have some meaning in which they all relate. So for example, mother, father, child(ren), uncle, aunt etc, all go together because they are in some way related and form part of the collection 'family'. However, some of these collections are constituted by members of uncharacterised, unrestricted, undefined populations likes 'sex' and 'age'. Sacks termed these 'Pn-adequate', which means any person may be characterised or situated in either of these categories because they have an age and are sex assigned a birth. As Schegloff (2007, p. 468) points out:

It is a fact of major importance that there are at least two Pn-adequate devices in every language/culture we know. In fact there are more, but two or more is what matters. It matters because it means that anyone can be categorized by some category from one device – say, female.

Most collections however are not referred to in this way (by age or sex) because members of those categories have already been 'delimited and characterized' e.g. teacher, student. The second feature of MCDs is that the categories within them contain certain 'rules of application'. These rules are applicable to both category and non-category members (1992, p. 238). For example, the 'economy rule' means that a single category is suffice to refer to some member of a population, even though multiple other categories could be used to describe that person; I could be referred to as a 'father' but also 'partner', 'walker', 'student', 'friend', 'speaker' and so on. Yet only one of these categories is required to provide meaning for others. Of course the

relevant category selected is dependent on the context in which the person is being referred to. Categories can also be ‘duplicatively organised’ to produce complete units like businesses with directors, managers and workers, or families with mums, dads and children and other familial configurations (Sacks, 1992, p. 240). Categories can also form ‘standardised relational pairs’ (e.g. husband/wife) each having their own rights, obligations, responsibilities and duties to the other (e.g. care and support) (Jayyusi, 1984). Categories are often hierarchically organised, where a doctor may be higher than a patient in the context of medical knowledge and skill. Another example would be adult in relation to an adolescent or child.

The final rule Sacks identified was the ‘consistency rule’. This means that if one category is used for some given population (e.g. Arsenal football supporters) then all other members of that population can be categorised the same, as they are presumed to have the same attributes (support the same team) (Sacks, 1992, p. 238-239). Sacks suggested that this latter rule contains two ‘hearer’s maxims’. He demonstrated this in his well-cited example from a children’s storybook - ‘The baby cried. The mommy picked it up’ (Sacks, 1992, p. 236). Sacks argued that we hear the baby as the baby of the mother, even though this is not explicitly stated. This occurs because, ‘If there are two categories used, which can be found to be part of the same collection, hear them as part of the same collection – which is how you hear them’ (Sacks, 1992, p. 239). However, the baby/mother relationship also contains a second ‘hearer’s maxim’. This links specific activities and predicates to a specific category of incumbents. Such that:

If a category-bound activity is asserted to have been done by a member of some category where, if that category is ambiguous (i.e. is a member

of at least two different devices) but where, at least for one of those devices, the asserted activity is category bound to the given category, then hear that *at least* the category from the device to which it is bound is being asserted to hold (Sacks, 1974, p. 224).

In other words, categories and incumbents are presumed to be doers of particular actions ‘category-bound activities’ and have specific characteristics ‘natural predicates’. For example, the social conventional is for babies to cry and mothers pick them up. Sharrock (1974, p. 49) explains the importance of category-bound activities and predicates;

The assignment of a name to a corpus sets up the way in which further description is to be done. The name is not, then, merely descriptive in that once it has been assigned it becomes a device-for-describing: that is, the name is not to be revised in light of events but is, rather, to be invoked in the description of whatever events occur.

What Sharrock is saying therefore, is that once a category has specific attributes assigned to it, these attributes don’t change but rather, become invoked in the category’s deployment (e.g. babies crying and mothers picking them up). These category-bound activities and predicates are also important for members in making sense of the everyday social world because this allows for people to make value assessments of other’s actions (Wowk, 1984, p. 76) This assessment of morality is important since, ‘standards, criteria, judgments, implications, etc. – are bound up

with various other practical matters – categorizations, descriptions inferences etc.’ (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 181). These moral values tend to become embedded over time through continuity of use, and because they appear ‘natural’, these moral values help influence members’ actions. That is, they constitute normative behaviour in which to judge the actions and characteristics of other people in the same or another category. When norms are breached a disjuncture occurs. This leads to other category members passing moral judgments on the transgression with accusations of the person being ‘an exception’, ‘different’, or even ‘defective’ (Schegloff, 2007, p. 469). Ultimately this would lead to the person either halting the transgressive behaviour or being re-categorised (Speer, 2005, p. 119-120). It is this and the other aspects of MCA, which I focus on in the following studies regarding ‘metrosexuality’.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Internet-mediated research (IMR) can raise particular, sometimes non-obvious, challenges I adhering to existing ethics principles...These include: the public-private domain distinction; confidentiality and security of online data; procedures for obtaining valid consent; procedures for ensuring withdrawal rights and debriefing; levels of researcher control; and implications for scientific value and potential harm (British Psychological Society, BPS, 2013, p.1).

I quote this particular version of BPS’ guidance for online research at the cusp of completing my thesis. Although such issues were in focus at the start of my online

research in 2008 and outlined in the BPS (2007) *Guidelines for ethical practice in psychological research online* many have now been updated and greater emphasis has been placed on issues such as the distinction between the public-private domain and the procedures for obtaining valid consent and informal copyright. It is these that I will consider in relation to the ethical procedures that I followed throughout the course of my doctoral research.

At the onset of my research in 2008 my supervisory team at the time didn't think ethical approval necessary since the online data I was about to use was in the public domain, that is, freely available and without the requirement to sign up. Therefore, ethical approval for the first two studies was not sought and the main safeguard for participants was anonymity via their tags, pseudonyms and avatars. Indeed, Hookway (2008:16) argues that people understand that their 'selfies' 'bitstrips' 'posts' 'comments' 'blogs' and so on are public and so consent is 'waived' and those that 'blogs that are interpreted by bloggers as 'private' are made as 'friends only'. If they want post to remain private they post as 'friends only'. Rodham and Gavin (2006) similarly point out that people realize that open access online space means others will observe and respond to their texts. Ethical concerns became more paramount when my supervision team changed in 2012. I was encouraged to apply to the university ethics team. However, the 2012 ethics for stated that if no direct contact with participants could be made to obtain consent then ethical approval didn't need to be sought and so no ethical approval form was submitted. This didn't mean however, that I didn't consider ethics before collecting data. Indeed, ethics has been a corner stone of my research from the outset, since it protects and values both the participant(s) and research(ers). What it does mean however, is that with hindsight I might follow a different procedure.

The key texts I consulted before I began my research were BPS (2007) guidelines, renowned papers such as Rodham and Gavin's (2006) *The ethics of using the Internet to collect qualitative research data* and Brownlow and O'Dell's (2002) *Ethical Issues for Qualitative Research in Online Communities*. All these texts focused on the key concerns for protecting a person's data in the public domain. The emphasis was on the researcher considering the dignity of persons, making sure the research was socially responsible and minimizing the harm to people through issues of; privacy, consent, anonymity, exploitation, authenticity, invasiveness, intrusiveness and disclosure. This translated into my ethical procedure for data collection as contacting the owner of the data to seek permission to use their data and anonymizing their data to avoid disclosure and harm. Informal copyright of online data played less of a role for a large part of my doctoral studies since the key texts I drew on emphasised the public availability and freer use in open-access sites I collected data from - AppleMac forum, the number one online men's magazine, YouTube video responses and 4VOO the number one men's cosmetic company marketing testimonials.

The procedure I followed was to collect the data and store securely and if possible contact the owner of the post or the site moderator(s). This I did three times documenting dates, times and content of the emails and if I couldn't obtain a response then I would assess the merits of using the data without permission with my supervisors. Most posters were unobtainable since they hid behind tags, avatars and pseudonyms - studies one, two and four. Only in study three was there a hyperlink to the video creator's private page that may have provided some mode of communication. I tried to contact all the persons and moderators I could but didn't receive a single response. My position at that time, based on key texts (BPS, 2007;



O'Dell and Brownlow, 2002; Rodham and Gavin, 2006) was that the data was intended for 'broadcast' as it was on highly visible and commercial websites and so an analysis of it was fine and indeed it would help our understanding of men and masculinities (Cranwell and Seymour-Smith, 2012). In hindsight, I would now be inclined to attempt various modes of communication placing greater emphasis on informal copyright (BPS, 2013; Winder et al., 2012). For example, rather than using only the moderators email, enquiry page or electronic post I would also try to obtain consent via the websites other contact routes, but also try to contact posters, where possible, via other sites they may use rather than just the one I'm interested

Although I wasn't able to gain informed consent I did anonymise the data specifically for study three since it had links to the creator's personal space. However, given that other data was already anonymised with tags, avatars and pseudonyms I considered it fine to present the data in full to provide detail and context in line with the requirements of ethnomethodological enquiry (Garfinkel, 1991). In retrospect I would now opt to anonymise all tags, avatars and pseudonyms as these may be specific to an individual and that person's identity inadvertently disclosed. Indeed, I am also now aware that in some cases even the text can trace the author if copied into a search engine. Whilst this can be useful for researchers in attempting to trace and contact individuals for permission to use data it may also disclose the identity of the author to others. For example, one may post about a specific store where an item is purchased or describe or name a school, place of work, friend, colleague etc. The extent of such disclosure may be minimised by limiting text and format to the minimum requirement format for academic analysis (Elgesem, 1996).

The final key point of consideration before I collected, and whilst analysing,

the data was author exploitation and who benefits from the research (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2002). Those who benefit include; I, the researcher, Nottingham Trent University and academic journals that publish the papers from the research. Yet my inability to contact participants meant that I had to make a difficult choice. Do I use the data or not? I weighed up the pros and cons and spoke to my supervision team and other doctoral students about what other alternative data sources I could use. The problem I had was that the methodology I was deploying meant that I had to use data where the researcher was absent. In addition, since 'metrosexuals' appear to be a marginalized and perhaps geographically dispersed, collecting face-to-face data where permission and exploitation issues could be minimised would be almost impossible. Even with flyers and posters it would prove methodologically questionable whether respondents were 'metrosexuals' given the potential stigma attached to men who wear makeup. Having thought through the possibilities I deemed this method of data collection and analysis as more beneficial than ethically problematic, proceeding to use the data with as much ethical and academic integrity as possible.

### **3. Study 1**

#### **‘Don’t you want to know if you’re “metro” too? : Magazine and reader constructions of ‘metrosexuality’ and masculinity.**

Since the launch of men’s lifestyle magazines in the 1980s, academic literature has predominantly focused on them as a cultural phenomenon arising from entrepreneurial and commercial initiatives and/or as cultural texts that proffer representations of masculinity such as ‘new lad’ and ‘new dad’. This study steps aside from the focus on culture and, instead, treats magazine content as a discursive space in which gender and sexuality are oriented to, negotiated, and accomplished within and beyond the magazine itself (i.e. through readers’ responses). Specifically, membership categorisation analysis is deployed to explore how the relatively new (and perhaps alternative) category for men - ‘metrosexual’ - is presented and received. The analysis suggests that masculinity concerns are central in debates about ‘metrosexuality’, with self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ invoking heterosexual prowess and self-respect on the one hand, and critics (e.g. self-identified ‘real men’) lamenting ‘metrosexuality’ for its perceived effeminacy and lack of authenticity on the other.

#### **Men’s Lifestyle Magazines**

Men’s lifestyle magazines in the U.K. have been identified as important spaces for

discussions and debates regarding masculinity (Jackson et al., 2001; Benwell, 2003; Edwards, 2006). Yet surprisingly, the magazines have rarely engaged directly with the phenomenon of the ‘metrosexual’, even though they continue to promote various ‘metrosexual’ grooming products (e.g. men’s moisturisers and anti-ageing creams) and cosmetics (e.g. men’s illuminators and eyeliners). Academic studies have predominantly focused on the more explicit and widely available magazine representations of the ‘new man’ of the 1980s and 90s, with his narcissistic and feminine side, or the current ‘new lad’ who has returned to ‘reactionary *pre*-feminist values’ (Edwards, 2006, p. 39), with an eye on what the shift from ‘new man’ to ‘new lad’ can tell us about contemporary men and masculinities (Edwards, 1997; Benyon, 2002; Benwell, 2003).

Studies of men’s lifestyle magazines have provided valuable insights into how masculine identities are represented and constructed in the media. However, they often fall short of offering a detailed analysis of how men *consume* these masculinities (notable exceptions include Jackson et al., 2001; Wheaton, 2003; Benwell, 2003, 2004) For example, does the individual reader decode these masculinities as advertised by the writer/editor of the magazine, or does the content have only partial or no resonance for the reader? (Morley, 1992). In light of the paucity of such studies, this study focuses on the fluidity of meanings attached to ‘metrosexual’ masculinity and how these are portrayed in the men’s online lifestyle magazine AskMen.com – and how these are received by a variety of readers.

## **UK Men’s Lifestyle Magazine Market**

Since the launch of *Arena* and *GQ* in the 1980s the number of men’s lifestyle

magazines has risen steadily. The market includes health-orientated titles such as *Men's Health* and *Men's Fitness*, up-market glossies such as *GQ* and *Arena*, the more 'laddish' magazines *Nuts* and *Zoo*, and online only versions *Askmen.com* and *Pixacom*. A measure of their popularity could be gauged by circulation figures – *FHM* reached 500,000 a month at its peak (Beynon, 2002). However by 2005, Mintel (2006, p. 3-5) market research pointed to a steady decline, identifying a 'like-for-like drop of 16% in average issue circulation. Six out of 12 titles were down with the sales decline sharpest for the larger-selling publications'. The trend seems to have continued, although unevenly, with some top titles such as *Maxim* and *Arena* ceasing print publishing in the UK (Brook, 2009). The reason for this decline is unclear. Some commentators (O'Carroll, 2009) point to competition from free paper publications. For example, *Shortlist* is enjoying a 5.1% increase in distribution figures. MediaWeek's (Crawley-Boevey, 2009) ABCe figures suggest a shift to free (and paid) online versions, with top titles such as *Menshealth.co.uk* having 'increased its unique users by 131% to 697,132 in January 2009'. This is also substantiated by Brand Republic (2007) and Reuters news agency (2009), both of whom identify Rupert Murdoch's *AskMen.com* as by far the most popular men's global online lifestyle magazine, boasting a 34% online market share, equating to 7 million readers a month. It seems then, that the phenomenon of men's style magazines is here to stay, albeit with a shift to online versions.

Men's magazines have enjoyed a much longer history than these recent developments, but what differentiates this batch is a shift in focus from the provision of information on men's hobbies and activities like cars, building and fishing, to promoting style and image-conscious consumption (Edwards, 2006, p. 37-8). Men's consumption is nothing new and can be dated back to the Victorian era, but it was

then in the main confined to subsistence and work related items. Women's relationship with consumption on the other hand was transformed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of the department store, from a subsistence practice to a leisure-based activity. As a consequence gendered identities developed in opposition to become 'a 'feminine' realm of consumption and a 'masculine' realm of production' (Osgerby, 2003, p. 59). For men to visibly display an interest in pleasures of shopping risked having their masculine credentials challenged. However in the 1980s, consumption patterns began to be:

...redefined as an activity that is suitable for men – rather than simply a passive and feminised activity – so that new markets can be penetrated....shopping is no longer a means to an end but has acquired a meaning in itself (Moore, 1989, p. 179).

In other words, we have seen the emergence of new forms of masculine expression, or rather, some men re-imagining their identities through their consumption choices. Various explanations have been put forward to account for this (see Collier, 1992; Featherstone, 1991; Gill, 2005; Simpson, 1994, 2002 in Chapter 1). While the reasons remain contested, it appears without doubt that men's lifestyle magazines were pioneers in opening up a new space for the circulation of different representations of men and masculinities. However, Benwell (2004) argues, that a tension still persists within men's style magazines between the promotion of consumption with its feminised undertones and a continued allegiance to more hegemonic forms of masculinity, which have tended to result in a presumed stability

where questions of sexuality and gender difference are concerned (Edwards, 2006). Yet in spite of this, the persistent fascination with the 'metrosexual' suggests that perhaps a shift is occurring in the perspective of some men's style magazines (e.g. *AskMen.com*).

## **Gender, Sexuality And Consumption In Men's Style Magazines**

Osgerby's (2003) historical study of men's consumption of fashion and beautification products indicates that this phenomenon is nothing new, citing the 'dandy', 'dude', 'playboy', and so on. He suggests that these men managed their stylistic consumption as a form of 'robust heterosexuality' (2003, p. 60), that is, carefully signposting consumption as heterosexual prowess in light of the culturally established feminisation of consumption. Even so, as Edwards (2003, p. 142) points out:

A well-dressed, well-groomed and 'stylish' man still tends to arouse anxieties concerning sexuality and masculinity or the terrifying twosome of the homosexual and the effeminate. Stereotypically, 'real' men don't care what they look like and just 'throw things on' whilst women go shopping and agonize over matters of self-presentation.

The problematic issue underlying heterosexual men's self-presentation is that it invites, not only attention from women but also from other men - the homoerotic gaze (Cole, 2000). In other words, such practices disrupt conventional notions of

looking (see Berger, 1972, p. 47). Moore (1989) and Cole (2000) suggest the eroticization of men and men's bodies became more evident in the 1980s through television adverts such as the famous Levi's 'Launderette' advert flaunting Nick Kamen's semi-naked body, which increasingly invited heterosexual men to view gay-inspired images. On a similar note to Berger (1972), Simpson (2004, p. 2) suggests that the commercial initiatives in pursuit of new markets for beautification products had:

...“queered” all the codes of official masculinity of the last hundred years or so: It's passive where it should be active, desired where it should be desiring, looked at where it should be always looking.

In his book, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (1994) Simpson argued in the chapter 'Narcissus Goes Shopping' that the potential for a 'homoerotic gaze' is more pronounced in men's style magazines because the reader is offered countless visual images of semi-naked male bodies advertising fashion, health regimes, aftershaves, razors and so on. The 'queering' of the male gaze unsettles traditional heteronormative hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) in opening up a space in which to raise questions of gender and sexuality identity. Men's style magazines, according to Edwards (2003), are acutely aware of this tension and the imperative of disavowing homosexuality and promoting gender difference in order to allow readers to enjoy images of other men and hitherto feminised grooming and cosmetic products.

Jackson *et al.* (2001) draw on the work of Ulrich Beck (1997) to provide a



useful framework for understanding how magazines deal with the undermining of traditional heteronormative hegemonic masculine scripts. Where the potential for uncertainty arises (e.g. other men's semi-naked bodies and advertising feminised products), magazines attempt to construct certainty by dismissing alternative forms of sexuality altogether or by rendering consumption unproblematic. In other words they 'construct certitude' in order to 'attempt to replace questioning and doubt with more certain frames of reference' (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 129). Their content and interview research with male readers and editors of men's style magazines showed that this is often achieved by relegating male body images and cosmetics to the back pages, men being photographed with women or in sporting poses, thus providing a reference to heterosexuality and gender difference.

In more discursive formats the magazines often use humour and irony to dismiss any risk of them being taken too seriously (Benwell, 2004). In places where a serious tone is required, for example regarding health issues, 'constructed certitude is most apparent in the profusion of 'how to' sections' (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 128) thereby providing a normalized tone. Edwards (2003) argues, men's style magazines tend to produce a constructed certitude based on sexual politics since it is more palatable for the magazine's readers to draw on traditional notions of heterosexuality and gender binary opposition than raise potentially 'tricky' questions over consumption and sexuality. Therefore the 'New Lad' is represented as a return to more conventional masculinity featuring heavy drinking, sport, heterosexual promiscuity, and so on. He is also portrayed as a conspicuous consumer e.g. casual and uncaring but still looking good, thereby retaining self-respect and manliness. The 'metrosexual', on the other hand, with his explicit narcissism and consumption of more feminised products e.g. cosmetics (see Harrison, 2008), is less easy to construct

with any certitude. This is perhaps why ‘lad’s mags’ such as *FHM*, *Loaded* and *Nuts* has been slow to engage explicitly with the ‘metrosexual’ phenomenon.

When ‘metrosexuality’ is covered it tends to be implicit (e.g. grooming products), or with a fleeting reference to the ‘metrosexual’ practices of iconic ‘metrosexual’ global football superstars such as David Beckham and Cristiano Ronaldo. In these contexts, ‘metrosexual’ practices are excusable as part of the footballer’s celebrity status (Carniel, 2009), in much the same way as David Bowie was able to wear make-up in the 1960s and 70s. Coad (2008) suggests that problems may also arise due to the ‘metrosexuals’ dual status of invoking a homoerotic gaze, whilst also being an asexual personal aesthetic (2008). Despite the apparent difficulties, some magazines (e.g. AskMen.com) are now beginning to engage with the ‘metrosexual’ phenomenon and attempt to re-construct and redefine the ‘metrosexual’ as a young *avant-garde* ‘metropolitan’ and ‘heterosexual’ man (Coad, 2008).

## **Approaching The Study Of Magazines**

Until relatively recently, the vast majority of magazine studies have focused on the content, ideology, and readership of women’s magazines (Ballaster et al., 1991; Hermes 1995; McRobbie 1991, 1999). McRobbie’s work suggested that magazines are able to open up a space for the negotiation and contestation of identities, which points to the multiple, shifting, ambiguous and often contradictory construction of femininities, which engages/disengages the reader. Recent studies of men’s lifestyle magazines have found similarities in how men’s style magazines construct

masculinities (see Jackson et al., 2001; Benwell's 2003 edited collection of essays and Wheaton 2003). However, as Edwards (2003, 2006) argues, most studies either deal with the magazines as a cultural phenomenon (why these magazines now) or as cultural texts (what these magazines mean for their readers), which tend to draw simplistic or deterministic conclusions of readers' relationships with the magazines. For example, Chapman and Rutherford's (1988) analysis of men's style magazines suggested demand for the magazines was a product of men's responses to second-wave feminism in the guise of the 'new man'. Edwards (2003, p. 134) argues that such interpretations are highly contentious since it is not clear whether the magazines were 'commercial initiatives in the market place or solely something men were demanding'. Indeed, this is supported by Jackson et al.'s (2001) research, which interviewed male readers of men's lifestyle magazines in the UK. Their interviewees expressed ambivalence towards both the content of, and the existence of the magazines.

Other studies have attempted to circumvent such issues, instead focusing on the language of the magazines and what this can tell us about cultural representations of femininity and masculinity. For example, Taylor and Sunderland's (2003) critical discourse analysis paper *'I've always loved women': the representation of the male sex worker in Maxim*, takes language as a choice in order to examine how it contributes to gender discourses. These they argue 'can reflect and construct social inequalities between men and women' (2001, p. 182). When men are paid to serve women sexually, the magazine presented these potentially demeaning practices positively (in contrast to their female counterparts). Although Jackson et al.'s (2001) interview research and Taylor and Sunderland's (2003) critical discourse analytical research warrants merit, neither method is able to provide a detailed micro-textual

level understanding of how readers receive and engage with magazine representations of masculinities. This paper therefore, deploys the tools of Membership Categorisation Analysis, which allows for an analysis of both the representation of masculinities and way in which readers' negotiate and contest these identities at the micro-textual level of the magazine space - and what such exchanges tell us about men's relationship to discourses circulating within the media.

## **Method**

This specific study draws on Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Sacks 1992) as a method for examining how identity markers such as 'metrosexual' are represented and deployed in the text of men's style magazines. As previously noted, the use of categories depends largely on the interactional business that the text-as-talk is designed to achieve. So for example, a celebrity in *Men's Health* magazine may be categorised as a 'father' 'runner' 'movie star' and so on, but the relevant category selected at each moment will depend on the context in which it is deployed. Hence, the use of each category will rely on the culturally rich common-sense knowledge carried within it – its 'inference richness' (e.g. 'runner' may invoke meanings of fitness, health, speed and so on), but also their relevant 'category-bound activities' (e.g. 'movie star' and acting). Yet if the link between category and appropriate predicate is brought into question, a disjuncture can occur leading to a potential accusation of difference (Schegloff 2007, p. 469).

These facets of categories tell us something about how social identities; realities, social ordering, social relationships and moral activity are played out in the deployment of categories. Nilan's (1994) work shows how the rights and obligations

of members of gender categories are maintained as the category-bound activities for being a 'man' or a 'woman'. This process also applies to how gendered categories are textually represented (Jayyusi, 1984). For example, in men's style magazines the 'new man', with his presumed typical feminine attributes such as 'caring' and 'communicativeness', or interests in 'food preparation' and 'fashion', tended to be held in much less regard and therefore more morally accountable in some magazines (e.g. *Nuts*, *FHM*; Edwards, 2003) whilst more conventional masculine identity labels like the 'new lad' were favoured (Stevenson et al., 2003). The existence of these different masculinities, how they are deployed and regarded, allows us a glimpse into how categories can lock gendered meanings into place, or as noted above, construct certitude in light of the potential ambiguities, as in the case of the 'metrosexual'. Conversely, they also allow us to see how:

The corresponding flexibility of categories means that category labels and their associated predicates and activities can be 'revolutionized' – something that lesbians and gay men have relied on in their reclaiming of words that were traditionally used as terms of abuse – such as 'queen' and 'dyke' (Speer 2005, p. 119-120).

Two routes Speer suggests we have in seeing this action in text-as-talk is to 'explore what happens when such categories are used contrastively, or when one category is used, and then repaired' (2005, p. 118). These tools allow us to view the negotiation of category parameters and social change in light of challenges to conventional gender-appropriate behaviour (Hester & Eglin 1997). MCA then, will be used to

explore how ‘metrosexuality’ is negotiated and constructed in a men’s style magazine in relation to men’s presumed obligations to more hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995). This method allows us to examine how mundane taken-for-granted ‘facts’ about gender-appropriate behaviour and characters are worked out in everyday talk.

## **Data**

The dataset I use was identified from a comprehensive Google search of men’s free online lifestyle magazines as identified by Mintel (2006), where discussions of ‘metrosexuality’ were explicitly taken up. Although there were frequent articles discussing typical metrosexual activities such as ‘how to shave body hair’ and ‘getting manicures’, there was only a limited amount of material, which directly engaged with ‘metrosexuality’ as a phenomenon. Of those remaining dedicated articles, Jake Brennan’s (2007) article ‘*Are You A Metrosexual*’ in AskMen.com was specifically selected for its number of reader posts - 54, its popularity (78% of readers rate it as excellent) and the magazine’s readership numbers – 8 million per month. Moreover, this article has drawn a variety of differing responses, with readers variously identifying as ‘metrosexuals’, ‘rugged’ men, gay men and women. I considered the readers responses for their length, depth and clarity of discussions. In particular, I selected 2 responses from each of the 4 categories, which stood out for their richness in detail and diversity of perspectives.

AskMen.com is a unit of Rupert Murdoch’s Fox Interactive Media, which is based in Canada and with editions in the US, UK and Australia. The data for this

analysis are primarily from the UK edition. Since 1999 AskMen.com has provided a daily online resource for men, with features on topics such as fashion, fitness, dating, money, sports, and entertainment. It also offers men advice and guidance on things like relationships, fashion, health, the use of technology and ‘hot sex tips’ for heterosexuals. Heterosexuality, as in most of the popular men’s style magazines, is underpinned by foregrounding scantily clad women. Where men’s bodies are shown they are in typically framed in sporting or muscular poses and tend to be truncated. Where the face is visible direct eye contact tends to be avoided, thereby allowing the reader the ability to enjoy the image without raising anxieties over sexuality.

As with other free online men’s style magazines, AskMen.com boasts a variety of computer-mediated communication opportunities for readers to engage with the content, such as blogs and discussion forums. This paper focuses on a popular and fairly ubiquitous resource – ‘readers’ comments/posts’, which is located either at the bottom of each electronic page or at the end of the article. Readers are able to pass comments of up to 800 characters in length and rate the article on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. Readers also anonymise themselves with ‘tags’ or ‘avatars’, and produce their ‘talk’ without face-to-face interaction; however, they are still able to achieve identities for themselves and each other through categorisation (see Vallis, 2001). The extracts appear in the original including spelling mistakes and vernacular expressions, albeit with avatars and signature omitted. We have included line numbers for ease of analysis.

## **Analysis**

I begin by considering the lead article by Brennan - ‘*Are You A Metrosexual?*’ – in

order to contextualise the reader responses, which I then analyse. I suggest that the article is structured around two main themes of interest regarding the construction of ‘metrosexual’ masculinity. The first theme focuses on the fluid meaning of ‘metrosexuality’ with respect to a range of often feminised practices. The second theme concerns attempts to construct certitude by defining and clarifying the parameters that constitute membership of ‘metrosexuality’. Both themes are discussed in the following two extracts that are drawn from the first two pages of Brennan’s article.

#### Extract 1

1. David Beckham has been called the poster boy for metrosexuality,
2. but don’t you want to know if you’re “metro” too?
  
3. *Metrosexual*
  
4. With so many buzzwords making their way onto, across, and off
5. the scene before you can say “supercalafragilisticexpi”—okay,
6. before you can say “boo”—you’ve probably already noticed that
7. you need help keeping up with today’s hippest terms. One of the
8. latest to confuse alert readers is metrosexual.
  
9. *Witness this:*
  
10. Joe says to Tyrone, “So this... guy , at work today, he calls me a
11. metrosexual at lunch in front of a bunch of people at the coffee



12. machine. I didn't know what to do!" "Whatever did you do?"  
13. implored Tyrone, with mock interest in Joe's latest miniature  
14. social crisis. "Well," said Joe, taking the cue, "I wasn't quite sure  
15. what he meant. So I says to him, 'What did you mean?' But before  
16. he can say anything... I'm just filled with this rage, you know?"  
17. says Joe. "So what did you do?" implored Tyrone, this time with  
18. genuine interest in his friend's violent tendencies. "I don't wanna  
19. tell ya. First, ya gotta tell me what the hell this metrosexual  
20. business is about, so's I'll know if I done the right thing or not. So  
21. spill, brainiac." Tyrone considered his response carefully, finally  
22. coming up with "Uhh...?" If a situation like this one has befallen  
23. you or someone you know, don't worry friend, you're not alone.  
24. The term in question is so close to something you firmly identify  
25. with, but as with "murse" (or "manbag," i.e. a man's purse), that  
26. first letter changes everything. So before you go punching some  
27. guy in the mouth that you shouldn't have—or worse, go missin'  
28. out on poppin' some guy ya shooda (which would probably  
29. indicate that you're not a metrosexual) – how about a little  
30. edification, for the road.

Brennan begins his article by directing readers' attention to David Beckham 'the poster boy for metrosexuality' (1), thus providing readers with an internationally known icon as a reference point. This immediately implies 'metrosexuality' as a normative (although new) masculine category, since David Beckham can be considered successful in business, marriage, fatherhood and sport – all classic

markers of masculine status (Donaldson, 1993). However, what is also evident from Brennan's introductory sentence is that there is potential for ambiguity and therefore the consequent need to construct certitude (Beck, 1997). Brennan's implicit position as an authority - 'don't you want to know if you're "metro" too?' (2) - echoes the 'how to' and 'advice and guidance' sections in men's style magazines commonly given to constructing certitude (Jackson et al., 2003, p. 128).

But 'why in this community (of readers) does it seem to trouble identity?' (Wetherell, 1998, p. 404). Brennan provides the answer: the metrosexuality question 'confuse(s) alert readers' (8), implying fluid or multiple parameters. He demonstrates this in a short vignette in which one of the characters, Joe, is telling Tyrone the story of his reaction to a guy who called him 'a metrosexual at lunch in front of a bunch of people at the coffee machine' (10-12). The colleague's categorisation of Joe as 'metrosexual' resulted in him filling with 'rage' (16) - Joe presumably read 'metrosexual' as another term for 'homosexual' and therefore a term of abuse. The categorisation work that Brennan achieves at this point in the article suggests that the category-bound activities and predicates of 'metrosexuality' are coterminous with 'homosexuality', which is commonly regarded as a 'defective', 'different' or 'phony' category (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007).

Brennan deals with the potential destabilisation of 'metrosexuality' and its presumed association with homosexuality by attempting a re-alignment with heterosexuality. Firstly, he identifies 'metrosexuality' as coterminous with heterosexuality: 'The term in question is so close to something you firmly identify with, but as with "murse" (or "manbag," i.e. a man's purse), that first letter changes everything' (25-26). Drawing on Speer's (2005, p. 119-120) description of categories, this move can be read as an attempt to lock a heteronormative meaning of

‘metrosexuality’ into place. This is also evident in Brennan’s second strategy, which invokes a subtle form of homophobia: ‘So before you go punching some guy in the mouth that you shouldn’t have—or worse, go missin’ out on poppin’ some guy ya shooda (which would probably indicate that you’re not a metrosexual) (26-29). Brennan’s category work also highlights the ‘corresponding flexibility of categories’, especially relatively new categories like ‘metrosexual’. In other words, the category label ‘metrosexual’, which was positioned in the extract as a potential term of abuse (for some heterosexual readers) – homosexual – is in the process of being reclaimed or “revolutionized” (Speer, 2005, p. 119-120).

The following section of Brennan’s article defines the category predicates associated with ‘metrosexuality’. The activities and attributes in the list provide readers with an ‘orientated-to-procedure’ (Jefferson, 1991, p. 68). In other words, it provides them with a means to position themselves in relation to a list, such that they can either ascribe to, or disavow membership, based on the items provided. Jefferson (1991) also noted that lists serve to normalise the cited practices thereby attempting to remove uncertainty. However, as Jefferson also noted, a list is always contestable, therefore it can be seen as ‘weak’ or containing inappropriate items, thereby potentially rendering identification problematic. In Brennan’s listing, ‘metrosexuality’ and its ambiguous category-bound activities and predicates, are manoeuvred into more heterosexual masculine territory.

#### Extract 2

31. *What is a metrosexual?*
32. The newly popular media and marketing buzzword seems to mean

33. different things to different people, but in general, a metrosexual :
34. \* is a modern, usually single man in touch with himself and his
35. feminine side;
36. \* grooms and buffs his head and body, which he drapes in
37. fashionable clothing both at work or before hitting an evening
38. hotspot;
39. \* has discretionary income to stay up to date with the latest
40. hairstyles, the newest threads, and the right shaped shoes;
41. \* confuses some guys when it comes to his sexuality;
42. \* makes these same guys jealous of his success with the ladies –
43. for many metros, to interact with women is to flirt;
44. \* impresses the women who enjoy his company with the details
45. that make the man;
  
46. *Among them:*
47. - his appreciation for literature, cinema, or other arts
48. - his flair for cooking
49. - his savoir faire in choosing the perfect wine and music
50. - his eye for interior design
51. - is a city boy or, if living a commute away from downtown, is
52. still urbane, if not rightly urban;
53. - enjoys reading men's magazines...

Brennan acknowledges 'metrosexuality' as a fluid identity with various interpretations 'seems to mean different things to different people' (32-33). His

response is to produce a general list of ‘metrosexual’ category-bound activities and predicates, which facilitates reader orientations to ‘metrosexuality’. However, many of the items on the list, and indeed the very notion of consumption itself, are commonly associated with femininity, for example, a concern with fashion (36-38), food preparation (48), interior design (50), and so on. Citing such predicates with their feminine undertones has the potential to produce anxieties concerning masculinity (e.g. effeminacy) and sexuality (e.g. homosexuality) (Edwards, 2003). Brennan deals with this unease by positioning these conventional feminised practices as part of a concomitant heterosexual masculine script. That is, linking ‘metrosexual’ predicates to more conventional masculine behaviours and attributes like ‘partying’ (37-38), ‘wealth’ (39), ‘sexual promiscuity and prowess’ (42-45) and ‘sophistication and culture’ (47-50). This serves to re-masculinise the ambiguous ‘metrosexual’-bound activities, a common strategy found not only in men’s magazines (Stevenson et al., 2003), but also in other areas where men are involved in typically feminised realms (see Simpson, 2005; Gough, 2007; Harrison 2008). What is also an interesting point with the article is that it highlights the potential transformativeness of categories and the flexibility pertaining to the deployment of aspects of masculinity (e.g. consumption), at least for some men. Glossing specific hitherto feminised metrosexual practices as masculine works to legitimise a contemporary consumer-oriented version of masculinity – and to hold traditional masculine disinterest in appearance as morally accountable (Jayyusi, 1984).

## **Readers’ responses**

The following extracts are a selection of readers’ responses to the Membership

Category Devices (MCD) ‘sex’ (Sacks, 1992). Readers explicitly define themselves as either ‘men’ or ‘women’. However, the category ‘men’ also acts as an MCD because readers perceive their identities as distinct from other male categories, for example ‘gay men’, ‘rugged men’ and ‘metrosexual men’. Membership of these categories, as our analysis will show, accrues certain rules largely determined by the perception of distinct category-bound activities and predicates. When a reader juxtaposes a category with activities that are not normatively associated with that category a disjuncture can occur requiring some level of moral accountability (Baker, 2000; Jayyusi, 1984).

### **‘Gay’ Male Responses: Metrosexuality As Superficial Strategy**

The following two examples have been posted by self-identified gay men:

#### Response 1

Posted 2007-08-17 03:15 Rating: ★★

54. *phillyphotoscott* says:
55. Nonsense. Metrosexuals are simply straight guys that do all of the
56. things that gay guys have done or been for years. They are the
57. copycats of wearing earrings, getting eyebrow trims, body hair
58. trims or waxings, manicures, are well-groomed, fashionable
59. dressers, polite, intelligent, culturally aware and respectful of
60. women as people instead of as conquests. They follow our
61. hairstyles, decorating styles creative directions, music cues, and
62. more. Many see the attention we get and want it themselves,
63. especially from women who regard us as fun friends and not

64. circling buzzards. BTW: Check out a gay club to find out what the
65. buzz will be next year. Oh, and it's spelled
66. Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

*Phillyphotoscott's* immediate response ('nonsense', 55), allied with his two-star rating of Brennan's article, provide an initial backdrop for his subsequent critique. *Phillyphotoscott's* statement 'Metrosexuals are simply straight guys that do all of the things that gay guys have done or been for years' (55-56) suggest heterosexual and homosexual identities can be contrasted on other aspects aside from sexuality (Speer, 2005, p. 118) and, moreover, that a blurring of heterosexual and homosexual identities is occurring. *Phillyphotoscott's* suggestion that 'straight men' 'are 'copycats' (57) of 'gay' identity casts 'straight' men's co-option of gay-associated practices as illegitimate, inauthentic and self-serving. Specifically, drawing on Hester and Eglin's (1997) 'category, predicate and task', a 'metrosexual' orientation serves to increase heterosexual prowess: 'Many see the attention we get and want it for themselves, especially from women' (62-63). *Phillyphotoscott's* critique of 'copycatting' allows us to see how members of a particular category perceive their identities as distinct from other identities and that potential identity forays are often met with challenges and defensive actions.

The next self-ascribing gay reader response also positions 'metrosexuals' as 'copycats', but this time of women's category-bounded activities and predicates as well as those of gay men. The contrasting of categories and their associated activities and predicates work less as an attack on 'metrosexuality', but more as a defense against social perceptions of gay men as effeminate. Thus the only apparent difference between homosexual and heterosexual men's identities is their sexual

preference and not their other category-bound activities and predicates.

## Response 2

Posted 2009-07-24 22:34 Rating: ★★★★★

67. *chameo* says:

68. Metrosexuals are men that look and act like women. Not all gay men  
69. act like women believe it or not. I'm gay myself and my friends at the  
70. lgbt club are not feminine. Only 2 out of 7 are full on feminine like  
71. "straight men think." Metrosexuals are not gay they just have good  
72. style like the stereotypical gay guy. So ya metrosexual is a man who  
73. has gay features. So what.

*Chameo's* statement that 'Metrosexuals are men that look and act like women' (68) sets the metrosexual up as a transgressor of feminine identity and consequently as occupying a non-normative masculine identity. This statement is followed by an immediate defense of gay identity 'Not all gay men act like women believe it or not' (68-69), further reinforced by a members insider knowledge: 'myself and my friends at the lgbt club are not feminine' (69-70). Non-normative categories such as homosexuality and 'metrosexuality' are often seen as delicate categories because they contravene the common-sense knowledge, or what is known about a masculine category, in a predominantly heteronormative society with perceived gender distinctions. Homosexuality therefore, is seen as 'exception', 'different', or even a disjunctive category by virtue of its member's sexual orientations (Schegloff, 2007, p. 469). Since homosexuality contravenes heteronormativity, it has often had feminine attributes ascribed to its members (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). Therefore, *chameo's* response can be read as suggesting that the majority of gay men 'only 2 out



of 7 are full on feminine' (70-71) are potentially more masculine than the heterosexual 'metrosexual', which Brennan suggests has gone mainstream (32, extract 2).

Both *chameo*'s and *phillyphotoscott*'s responses then work to reposition gay identities as superior to conventional heterosexual and heterosexual 'metrosexual' identities in their masculinity or fashion styles, which serves to challenge the authenticity and newness of 'metrosexuality' that Brennan is suggesting. This also provides us with a valuable insight into how members attempt to lock category meaning into place, such that homosexuality and heterosexuality are distinct identities, whilst at the same time demonstrating how heterosexuality as a category label is in the process of being 'revolutionised' by incorporating non-normative category-bound activities and predicates (Speer, 2005, p. 119). In other words, the way categories and the meanings attached to them are 'challenged, preserved, overthrown and renewed' (Nilan, 1995, p. 71).

### **Responses From Women: Metrosexuals As Love/Hate Figures**

In the next two responses from women readers there is a mixed response to 'metrosexuality'. The first can be seen as an attempt to preserve conventional gendered identities, whereas the second supports this contemporary form of masculinity.

Response 3

Posted 2009-07-10 18:46 Rating: None

74. *A girls opinion* says:
75. HATE METROSEXUAL GUYS! THERE ALL INSECURE AND
76. GAY AND THEY WILL NEVER LOOK AS GOOD AS WOMEN
77. CAN.

An initial gloss of this response is just a simple distain for Brennan's article and 'metrosexuals', demonstrable in capitalisation and extreme case formulations ('HATE'; 'ALL'; 'NEVER': 75-76). However, if we use Hester and Eglin's (1997) 'category, predicate and task' we can see that she presumes that 'metrosexuality' and its associated activities and predicates constitute an attempt by men to look better than women, which she objects to. What is also evident is the presumption that male and female identities should normatively be distinct from each other, with gendered practices and ideals retained as separate spheres, which provides security of identity. 'Metrosexuals', on the other hand, are seen to be challenging this discreteness and so her response contains a three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) of terms designed to undermine this category: 'THERE ALL INSECURE'... 'GAY'... 'NEVER LOOK AS GOOD AS WOMEN' (75-76). The list (and the whole response) therefore works to challenge the positive stance of the article, halt men's forays into feminised identity spaces and lock or preserve conventional gendered meaning (Speers, 2005).

#### Response 4

Posted 2008-04-22 19:15 Rating: ★★★★★

78. *Monica* says:
79. Hello. I came upon this article as I was googling the term
80. metrosexual to find out if I was right about my ex. I probably

81. shouldn't be posting since this seems to be a site for men but I just  
82. wanted to say that this is a great article. It describes my ex 100%.  
83. And it's true metrosexuals are not gay they just care about the way  
84. they look and therefore like to be clean and have good hygiene. My  
85. ex also liked cooking and dancing. He was very understanding and  
86. well-mannered too and lived on his own downtown. And was good  
87. at flirting. People would think he was gay from the way he looked  
88. since he was well-groomed (did the eyebrows etc.). I thought so too  
89. when i first met him. But I just want you all to know that you are  
90. right—Girls do like Metrosexuals! I would definitely date one again

Conversely, *Monica's* positive response sees Brennan's article as advice and guidance: 'this is a great article. It describes my ex 100%' (82). She presents the article as usefully confirming suspicions about her ex and his non-normative category-bound activities and predicates, such as investment in personal hygiene and self-presentation. *Monica* supports this new type of 'metrosexual' masculinity, actively drawing on aspects of Brennan's list of 'metrosexual'–bound activities and predicates (see extract 2). This endorsement also serves as an implicit critique of more conventional masculinities, particularly a disdain for self-presentation. However, although *Monica* voices support for these developments in masculine identity she is careful to maintain, like Brennan, that this does not raise issues concerning metrosexuals' sexuality, since 'it's true metrosexuals are not gay' (83) and that 'Girls do like Metrosexuals!' (90). *Monica's* support and construction of 'metrosexuality' allows us to the 'social identity boundary maintenance work' of new (and old) gendered identities in which speakers categorize and position themselves

and others in relation to particular conceptions of gender (Nilan, 1994, p. 142).

## **Responses From Traditional Men: Backlash!**

In the next two responses from self-identifying ‘real men’, we can see that ‘metrosexual’ trends are seen as a challenge to orthodox masculinity.

### Response 5

Posted 2008-10-06 14:57 Rating: ★★★★★

91. *Robert* says:
92. Men today are too concern about the way they look is true. but
93. many times is not their fault, society makes them that way..for ex;
94. when someone goes for a job interview; oh you gotta shave that
95. ruggedness..oh you have to have those finger nails clean..oh you
96. have to use moisturizers oh your face and hands.. and oh of course
97. you have to use hair product of some kind. But Real Men
98. shouldn't worry much about the way they look and is that rugged
99. manly grossness that most hot and sexy women are attracted too.

So, when men opt for ‘metrosexual’-style practices, it is not a free choice, nor can they be blamed (‘not their fault, society makes them that way’: 93). The lengths to which men are supposedly now required to go to are emphasised in a four-item list (‘shave’; ‘nails clean’; ‘moisturizers’; ‘hair product’), rendered in a satirical way to undermine their provenance (‘oh you have to have...’). Such excessive and unnecessary activities are then contrasted to the preferred essence of the capitalized

‘Real Men’ who are unconcerned with appearance since their natural state of ‘rugged manly grossness’ (98-99) enhances his (hetero-)sexual attractiveness (to ‘hot and sexy women’: 99). By implication, a ‘metrosexualised’ man, albeit time- and situation- limited, is a mere false shadow of masculinity unable to secure sexual success.

#### Response 6

Posted 2008-08-10 21:32 Rating: None

100. *Kem* says:

101. I would be offended being called a metrosexual, which I am not. I

102. definitely would be punching somebody or at least confront them.

103. That’s why I dress like a man and behave like one. Guys are

104. getting too soft out there. Women hate that. They like rugged men,

105. just like we are supposed to be. Peace out.

*Kem*’s response appears to relate to the Brennan’s introductory section by providing the reader with an account of how he would respond to someone calling him a ‘metrosexual’ ‘I definitely would be punching somebody or at least confront them (101-102). This repudiation of metrosexuality is predicated on an unmanly dress sense and general ‘softness’ (104), and *Kem* positions himself firmly in the non-metro masculine camp (‘I dress like a man and behave like one’: 104). A trend towards softness is critiqued (‘too soft’: 98) on the basis that such an orientation is unappealing for the opposite sex (‘Women hate that’: 104) – precisely the same warrant invoked previous pro-‘metrosexual’ discourse (see below)! The use of sweeping categories (‘guys’, ‘women’), allied with short, definitive statements

(‘Guys are getting too soft’; ‘Women hate that’), lends the account an authoritative air. The claim about women’s preferences is then elaborated (‘They like rugged men...’: 104), deploying an alternative male category that is then given a positive moral gloss (‘just like we are supposed to be’: 105). Thus the status of traditional men is worked up while the contemporary ‘metrosexual’ man is subordinated. In more Membership Categorisation Analysis terms, *Kem*’s display of appropriate category knowledge for a ‘man’ (103) positions him ‘as powerful knower of the ‘right’ way for ‘real’ men to act” (Nilan, 1994, p. 158) – and how such actions will be received by others, notably women. As a result he implies ‘metrosexual’ dress sense is coterminous with ‘homosexuality’, and it follows that, if the ‘metrosexual’ does not attract women, then he must presumably attract other men.

### **Responses From ‘Metrosexuals’: Defending The Modern Man**

The following two responses from self-ascribing metrosexuals can be seen to defend and negotiate their identities in relation to potential charges such as ‘effeminacy’ and ‘homosexuality’; they can also be read as claims to the authenticity and legitimacy of a new masculine identity. The first response by Rafael makes explicit reference to Robert (response 5), but also appears to draw on Brennan’s list of category-bound activities and predicates. In this post it is ‘real’ men who are pilloried while men who qualify as ‘metrosexual’ via grooming habits and body care are construed as more masculine, as indicated by heterosexual success:

## Response 7

Posted 2008-11-06 03:10 Rating: None

106. *Rafael* says:

107. Robert, just like you think now, once I thought that metrosexual  
108. was a gay guy that dresses like a man, or something too delicate to  
109. be a man. Later I found out, I was a metrosexual myself. A man that  
110. does care for his looks, the way he smells, the way he behaves, the  
111. way he approaches women and a man that goes to the gym trying to  
112. keep his looks up. I am 32 and I can say I have been successful with  
113. woman my entire life never needing to pay for one to please me,  
114. like some real man as they think they are with their rugged manly  
115. grossness need to do, because a sane sexy woman can not take his  
116. beer and tobacco smell unless they pay her to do it. I am married  
117. now, I am the father of a beautiful girl and the husband of a  
118. stunning woman I love, and you know what guys, I am still a  
119. metro.

*Rafael's* response is easily glossed as a simple 'metrosexual' rebuttal to Robert's post (response 5), but it extends to asserting 'metrosexuality' as more assured, effective and masculine than conventional masculinity. This stance is first advanced through recourse to knowledge and enlightenment: 'just like you think now, once I thought that metrosexual was a gay guy that dresses like a man, or something too delicate to be a man. Later I found out, I was a metrosexual myself' (107-109). Secondly, Rafael emphasises masculine identity markers of self-respect: 'A man that does care for his looks, the way he smells, the way he behaves' (109-110), and heterosexuality: 'I

have been successful with woman my entire life' (112-113). What is also interesting about *Rafael's* post is that rather than only construct an argument that accounts for his non-conformity to conventional masculinity, he makes conventional men morally accountable for their lack of self-respect, which he claims affects their heterosexual masculine status 'I have been successful with woman my entire life never needing to pay for one to please me, like some real man as they think they are with their rugged manly grossness need to do, because a sane sexy woman can not take his beer and tobacco smell unless they pay her to do it' (112-116). What *Rafael's* response does then, is to allow us to see how the emergence of a new identity category can be used to hold more conventional identities morally accountable for not succumbing to social change, whilst at the same time drawing on aspects of conventional masculinity to bolster the vaunted contemporary configuration of masculinity (Jayyusi, 1984).

#### Response 8

Posted 2008-10-07 08:18 Rating: ★★★★★

120. *man* says:

121. I have been called a metrosexual multiple times by girls and I

122. thought it has a bad connotation. After reading this article, I feel

123. more comfortable about myself now. I like the comment about

124. how being a "metrosexual" is the new word for cultured men. I

125. know how to cook, clean, sew and groom myself. I use two types

126. of hair styling products, use cleansers, use moisturizers, wear

127. fashionable clothes, not averse to shopping, and i am a romantic.

128. All of those point towards me being a metrosexual and I like it. I



129. am being hit on a lot more now after my transition of being a  
130. bookworm to a chique guy.

*Man*'s initial response is similar to Brennan's introductory account (extract 1 above) of metrosexuality being used and frequently understood as a term of abuse: 'I thought it has a bad connotation' (121-122). However, *Man*'s subsequent response is to treat Brennan's article as an 'advice and guidance' magazine section, which reveals some kind of factual truth or a 'constructed certitude' (Beck 1997) for the phenomenon of 'metrosexuality'. *Man* relates to the category of 'cultured man', which is treated as a coterminous category for 'metrosexual' (124), and which carries a variety of category-bound activities and predicates traditionally associated with women and femininity e.g. 'cook, clean, sew' and so on (125). However, his account of metrosexual identity seems to suggest that these 'metrosexual' activities are more masculine and trendy than his previous categorisation 'being a bookworm' (130).

Yet since 'metrosexuality' involves traditional feminised activities, *Man* appears to be aware of the potential for these to be seen as a 'phony' masculine category e.g. 'homosexual' or 'effeminate' (Sacks, 1992). As such, rather than simply identify with 'metrosexual' practices, he explicitly links his new persona of 'chique guy' to (hetero-)sexual attractiveness: 'I am being hit on a lot more now' (128-129). In other words, *Man* re-masculinises his 'metrosexual' identity. This response demonstrates the difficulties in transgressing socially defined gender binaries - and the perceived need to normalise and legitimise these activities. What is also evident from this response is that 'tell it like it is' magazine articles appear to act as important benchmarks for those readers seeking clarification for participation in non-normative activities.

## Concluding Remarks

This study drew specifically on MCA to engage with a unique example of a men's lifestyle magazine article engaging with the 'metrosexual' phenomenon to identify how common-sense cultural knowledge pertaining to gender identities is invoked in the naming and development of new categories and predicates associated with particular groups. With the apparent turn to online consumption of men's magazines, the study explored readers' electronic engagement (via comment posts) with magazine content. The amount of posts suggests this format as an effective way of attracting readers, particularly bearing in mind the potential for extended debate long after the stimulus magazine content has been published. The main focus of the analysis was of course the 'metrosexual'. Although 'metrosexuality' is often glossed as simply a man participating in personal adornment, certain fashions and the use of grooming and cosmetic products, the magazine article and readers' responses to it suggest that aspects of conventional masculinity are being challenged - but also reproduced and re-worked to incorporate contemporary consumption and lifestyle patterns.

The analysis has also shown that 'metrosexuality' has elicited both positive and negative responses and raised questions over the fixity of traditional gendered identities. Brennan's article provided an argument for 'metrosexuality' as a new and exciting heterosexual masculine identity, an argument enthusiastically endorsed by self-ascribing 'metrosexual' readers who nonetheless framed their identity in terms of classic masculine markers such as self-respect and heterosexual success. However, non-'metrosexual' responses were mixed. *Phillyphotoscott* challenged the newness of 'metrosexuality', claiming it to be a 'copycat' gay identity co-opted by straight men.

*Chameo*, on the other hand, suggested that ‘metrosexual’ men were appropriating women’s pursuits. The two women respondents positioned themselves at either end of the spectrum, with *Monica* supporting these changes in men and masculinity and *girl* viewing them as challenges to feminine identity. Challenges to gendered identity were also visible in the responses from ‘real’ men *Robert* and *Kem*. *Robert* attributed the metrosexual phenomenon to social pressures to conform, whereas *Kem* located blame with the individual. Thus we have a range of responses to ‘metrosexuality’, with some predictable and oppositional stances from self-identified metrosexuals and men classing themselves as ‘real’ or ‘rugged’, while the contributions of gay men and women proved mixed.

What is common to all data covered in this study, however, was a reliance on the cultural commonplace that society is predominantly heterosexual comprising two sexes associated with distinct gendered attributes and category-bounded activities. As the analysis showed, it is extremely difficult for other membership categories to emerge which encompass attributes and activities normally associated with the opposite sex – new members risk being positioned as ‘defective’ or ‘phony’ (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007). When such categories are articulated they face moral accountability for transgressing conventional gender identity boundaries (Jayyusi, 1994). Many of the charges by non-‘metrosexuals’ were seen to have materialised from more normative (‘real’) forms of masculinity, constructing ‘metrosexuality’ as superficial, inauthentic and unmanly. The pull of conventional masculinity is highlighted by ‘metrosexual’ supporters’ moves to masculinise ‘metrosexual’ activities (self respect, sexual success). The analysis therefore, shows that studying ‘metrosexuality’ allows us a greater insight into how identity categories regulate practices and the difficulties people face in challenging the boundaries of gendered

identities. Studying everyday category use is important for understanding how everyday interaction is achieved through categorisation, how they are used, what is involved in setting out categories and what is known about the members and the properties of the category.

More generally, the moves to masculinise ‘metrosexual’ activities highlight the enduring appeal of hegemonic masculine ideals and practices. While ‘metrosexuality’ can readily dispense with denigrated, unfashionable aspects of the traditional male repertoire (poor hygiene, disinterest in appearance, sagging physiques), it nonetheless draws on still powerful masculinised markers such as self-respect and heterosexual success. Such analysis concurs with the other work in men’s studies discussed in Chapter 1, which underlines masculinity as a multifaceted resource which can be creatively deployed to fulfil various functions (Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Gough, 2007; DeVisser & Smith, 2008). At the same time, the analysis reminds us of the continued power exerted by particular aspects of hegemonic masculinity and the way these can be incorporated into newly forming identifications and practices, repackaged for a consumer-driven image-conscious society.

Further work is required to examine the construction and negotiation of ‘metrosexuality’ in other online and offline contexts. For example, where ‘metrosexual’ activities are advocated by men (e.g. wearing make-up). Such a focus on the ‘doing’ of ‘metrosexuality’ (e.g. the application of eyeliner) would add a much-needed visual dimension to the research while capturing ‘metrosexual’ practices in situ. This challenge I take up in the preceding chapters on a YouTube video and responses, but also online makeup testimonials.

Having examined how ‘metrosexuality’ was discussed by a media text and various different readers the next study focuses more specifically on self-identified

'metrosexuals' to gain a clearer understanding of the boundaries of this identity. That is, is it just image-conscious practices and behaviours and if not, then what are they? But also, how these men negotiate their identity in relation to others.

## **4. Study 2**

### **‘Any other metrosexuals in here?’: Constructing metrosexuality and masculinities in an online forum**

Here I focus specifically on the negotiation of ‘metrosexuality’ and its associated non-conventional masculine activities and behaviours. Of course as we have seen these are linked to contemporary consumption and lifestyle opportunities such as manicures and pedicures (Gill et al., 2005). While previous studies in Chapter 1 were pertaining to media representations of ‘metrosexuality’, ‘new’ masculinities, and the marketing of health and beauty products to men, little is known about how men define, self-identify and disavow contemporary identity markers like ‘metrosexual’. The existence of on-line forums dedicated to the discussion of metrosexuality provided an obvious opportunity to examine contemporary masculinities. In this study I report on one such Internet forum, using membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1972, 1992) to investigate the deployment of metrosexuality and related identity categories. The analysis aims to highlight the masculinised parameters through, which metrosexuality is taken up, or rejected, which include notions of vanity, conspicuous consumption, professional status and sexual prowess.

### **Masculine Identity Categories**

The common theme across contemporary masculine identity categories (e.g. ‘metrosexual’ ‘SNAG’, ‘gastrosexual’ and so on - see Appendix 1 for definitions and additional masculine identity labels) and also present in previous incarnations such as

the 'Dandy' of the Eighteenth Century and the 'new man' of the 1980s, is men's participation in historically feminised practices (Coad, 2008, p. 22-24). Many of these changes have been spurred on by media representations of men, which have contributed to the increasing visibility of men's bodies (Gill et al., 2005). Where once female bodies dominated style magazines, newspapers and televisions, men's bodies are now just as likely to feature. The launch of men's lifestyle magazines in the 1980s (e.g. GQ) and other mass-market men's publications (e.g. Men's Health), along with billboard images have helped to firmly establish the presence of the men's bodies as objects to be eroticized and consumed (Gill et al., 2005). As we saw in Study 1, Chapter 3, the greater visibility of men's bodies has lead some men at least to re-evaluate and re-construct what it is to be male.

Such forays into hitherto feminine identity territory have led some to wonder if conventional or 'hegemonic' (Connell, 1995) forms of masculinity have been superseded or modernized (see MacInnes, 2001). Social science scholars do seem to agree that these new developments are producing interesting places of slippage where traditional and distinct gendered ways of being are potentially undermined and contested (Whitehead & Barrett 2001). For example, as we saw with Simpson's (2005) and others (see Chapter 1, Men In Feminine-Type Environments) interviewees reported having their manliness challenged and reframed aspects of their job in more conventionally masculine ways.

So despite rumours of demise, it would seem that hegemonic masculinities still wield power even in situations where men are ostensibly taking up feminized positions and practices. To date, however, the literature has featured little direct engagement with how men orientate to and negotiate emergent category membership in the company of other men (or women). One apparent reason for this absence is

that modern gendered identity categories are easily dismissed as inconsequential, or even as marketing fabrications (Coad, 2008, p. 26–32). But we don't yet know how men ascribe to modern identity categories such as 'metrosexual' or how men's discursive practices link to masculine identity in this context.

As previously identified, an obvious place to access suitable data featuring self-ascribing 'metrosexuals' is the Internet, since it is routinely associated with freedom of expression, critiques of established off-line social and personal practices, and the creation of alternative on-line communities and identities (Slouka, 1995). Given this, this study thus examines metrosexual 'talk' within a distinct and popular format – the Internet discussion forum – an electronic bulletin board where forum members begin threads for discussion, building bonds and reaching other interested parties. I focus on how forum members achieve identities for themselves, each other and absent others through the same process of membership categorization as found in offline contexts (Vallis, 2001).

## **Method**

As with the previous study I draw on MCA (Baker, 1997; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1972, 1992; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2003; Wowk, 1984) as an analytical apparatus. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Sacks identified categories as having some 'rules of application' such as following an economy consistency rule, being duplicatively organized, coming in standardised relational pairs, being hierarchically organised, and with associated actions (category-bound activities) and characteristics (natural predicates). But to recap it's worth asking the question Schegloff (2007, p. 469) asks 'why should one care all that much about



these terms and their deployment?’ He points out that their importance for study is due to their ‘inference richness’ and so they store huge amounts of culturally rich common-sense knowledge (e.g. social norms, morals, etc.) within them. Such common-sense knowledge about each category is often slow, or even not revised. Those who contravene category norms may be seen as a ‘phony’ (Sacks, 1992), ““an exception”, “different”, or even a defective member of the category’ (Schegloff, 2007, p. 469), or indeed re-categorized (Speer, 2005, p. 119–20).

The importance of this common-sense knowledge for members and non-members is that it allows for sense making of the everyday social world via value assessments of people’s activities (Wowk, 1984). For example, Widdicombe and Woofitt’s (1990) interviews with self-identified ‘punks’, ‘rockers’, ‘gothics’ and ‘hippies’ showed that genuine and non-genuine group identity assessments centred on things like members’ knowledge and commitment to the identity category, time as a member, fully participating in the activities, embracing characteristics and so on. Those that failed such assessments were frequently thought of as inauthentic or not ‘real’ members.

In order to for us to see how such things come into play within a stretch of talk, Baker (1997, p. 142–43) suggests working through three analytical steps:

1. Locate the central categories that are named and/or implied by their activities in the talk.
2. Focus on the activities and predicates associated with each category.

3. Look at how members produce categories, activities and predicates connections for the implied social actions. That is, the ‘descriptions of how categories of actors do, could or should behave’.

Applying these steps to ‘metrosexual talk’ then, I will show how men participating in activities like self-adornment, fashion and grooming, conventionally held to be for members of the category ‘women’ (Edwards, 2003), justify and negotiate their actions.

## **Data**

Given that the Internet boasts a variety of computer-mediated communication opportunities this study focuses on a distinct and popular format – the Internet discussion forum – an electronic bulletin board where members of the website can begin threads for the purpose of discussion, building bonds and reaching other interested groups. Online data where the category ‘metrosexual’ was explicitly taken up (and also disavowed) was identified from an extensive search and cataloguing of Internet forums. These appeared on a variety of sites such as gaming sites (e.g. Rangerboard), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), local community boards, and many others.

I also encountered many forums discussing metrosexuality as a topic and activities claimed to be metrosexual, such as ‘shaving chest hair’ and wearing ‘make up’. I considered the ‘metrosexual’ data from these sites for their length, depth and clarity of discussions. The majority of the forums only contained limited (e.g. 4–7) metrosexual posts. However, members’ contributions from the MacRumours forum

thread ‘Metrosexuals?’ (<http://forums.macrumors.com/showthread.php?t=163687>) stood out for the sustained attention to the matter at hand, richness in detail and diversity of members’ perspectives, and so I decided to focus on this dataset. The extracts I focus on are part of a much larger (65 posts) and ongoing discussion by the MacRumours forum members to the thread ‘Metrosexuals?’, the main thrust of which was the product of a day and a half’s discussion in November 2005).

Forum contributors access the MacRumours website for Apple news, Apple Rumours and to participate in community, social and intellectual discussions, ranging from ‘*Seriously considering a handgun...*’ to ‘*God The Ultimate Human Meme – Intrinsic, Integral, or Irrelevant?*’ Typically on such discussions the electronic dialogue flows for a while before participants withdraw as they presumably go about their daily activities, and then later dialogue re-opens. The data in this study is extracted from a much larger and ongoing discussion by the MacRumours forum members to the thread ‘Metrosexuals?’ Some of the later contributions to the thread were discounted because although they contained relevant material on ‘metrosexuality’. These discussions were often short-lived or fragmented, quickly switching to other unrelated topics. This particular section of the MacRumours forum thread aside, features a detailed and dedicated discussion of ‘metrosexuality’ and its predicates along with, and in relation to, other relevant categories such as homosexuality, heteronormative masculinity and femininity.

I present the written text of the extracts in their original form, including spelling mistakes and vernacular expressions. In line with conventional transcription conventions (Jefferson, 1984) I have included line numbers for analytical purposes, but have removed members’ avatars and signatures for ease of presentation and analysis.

## **Analysis**

Throughout the MacRumours ‘Metrosexuals?’ thread, contributors defined ‘metrosexuality’ largely in terms of men who are consumers of fashion, grooming and beauty products. Those disavowing ‘metrosexuality’, however, structured their arguments and criticisms in relation to what Connell (1995, p. 223) calls the ‘symbolism of difference’ i.e. the symbolic opposition of femininity and masculinity that leads to perceptions of ‘gender-appropriate’ activities (see also Edwards, 2003, p. 141-142). With this in mind, I focus here on five extracts featuring discussions of ‘metrosexuality’ in relation to other categories (e.g. women, homosexuals, preppy, übersexual and other more conventional men). The analysis centers on the following three main points of interest. The first centers on sexuality, and specifically the boundary work needed to establish a distinction between ‘metrosexuality’ and homosexuality, and a connection between ‘metrosexuality’ and heterosexuality. The second focuses on the negotiation of candidate metrosexual-bound activities and predicates contra other masculine categories. The final point of interest considers the various distancing strategies employed by self-ascribing metrosexuals to negotiate category membership. I suggest that ‘metrosexuality’ is being situated in relation to a perceived hierarchy of masculinities, and also in relation to notions of discrete sexes.

### **Metrosexuality contra homosexuality**

Focusing on sexuality and the boundary work needed to establish a distinction between metrosexuality and homosexuality, I begin the analysis with the initial sequence of electronic talk from the MacRumours ‘Metrosexuals?’ thread.

Extract 1

*Simplistic* 11-26-2005, 01:48 am

1 Any other metrosexuals in here? I know I'm not the only one.

2 Embrace your self-loving nonsense.

---

*Lacero* 11-26-2005, 01:49 am

3 Your 7<sup>th</sup> post and *this is it?*

4 What does it matter, anyway?

---

*Simplistic* 11-26-2005, 01:54 am

5 It doesn't matter. That's not the point. Just asking. And I'm

6 bored...

---

*homerjward* 11-26-2005, 01:56 am Ref: Lines 5 – 6

7 don't worry, Lacero's just echoing edesignuk's first

8 comment<sup>4</sup> in this thread (asking whether there were any gay

9 people at this forum) btw, lacero edesignuk didn't italicize "is

10 it" and he flipped the two clauses in the 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence.

---

*Lacero* 11-26-2005, 01:57 am Ref: Line 5 – 6

11 sorry if i come off sounding like a jerk, i dont mean to at all,

12 and indeed, Welcome to the forums i just dont understand the

13 need to ask this question i guess, but thats probably because

---

<sup>4</sup> This remark is about a mirrored comment made by edesignuk in forum 'GayWay - the gay and lesbian discussion' (aka. Any Gays here?) in which edesignuk posted 'Your 1st post, and *this is it?* 🤔 Anyway, what does it matter?'

14 im a ditz (and proud of it too)

---

*sjpetry* 11-26-2005, 01:58 am

15 How about any closet metros?

---

*Simplistic* 11-26-2005, 02:02 am

16 I used to be in the closet about it. It was so annoying.

17 Whenever I'd do something dainty I'd get weird looks from

18 my parents. Eventually they stopped caring and I was

19 tweasing my eyebrows without a care in the world!

---

*Seasought* 11-26-2005, 02:03 am

20 I don't believe I am.

21 I'm not terribly liberal.

22 I'm not really into fashion (though I have my own

23 eccentricities).

24 I would hope I have a reasonable sense of taste.

25 I am hetero, however.

---

*mad jew* 11-26-2005, 02:11 am

26 I wear collared shirts and I don't drink beer...

---

*Simplistic* 11-26-2005, 02:11 am

27 I like the attention I get from being the way I am. Like, I have

28 this attitude that is like, "Hey, ladies. I look good and I don't

29 even know it... or do I?" So the girls think, "Hmm, that guy  
30 looks good, but he doesn't look too full of himself. Let me go  
31 talk to him." It's good.  
32 Right on, jew. I don't drink nor smoke. I hate drinking and  
33 smoking would only be cool if it didn't have the nasty side  
34 affects.

---

*mkrishnan* 11-26-2005, 02:14 am

35 I am, I am! Although, I need a manicure, and I haven't seen my  
36 hair stylist in a longer amount of time than any time since I moved  
37 here. \*le sigh\* <sup>5</sup>

*Simplistic's* opening 'Any other metrosexuals in here?' (1) makes the category 'metrosexual' relevant. However, his suggestion that metrosexuality is a relevant topic of discussion prompts *Lacero* to respond by similarly echoing a previous post in another forum thread 'GayWay - the gay and lesbian discussion' (see footnote 6) culminating in the dismissive 'What does is matter, anyway?' (4). *Lacero's* response indicates that some sort of normative code may be breached if this topic is discussed because it may potentially be a 'non-tellable' (West & Garcia, 1988). That is, dispreferred conversational pursuits (e.g. women's personal feelings) or non-tellable topics (e.g. homosexual behaviour). But what kind of 'non-tellable' at this point in the text is unclear, although we do get a sense of it from *Simplistic's* 'Embrace your self-loving nonsense' (2), which suggests male vanity or narcissism. These category predicates, as Edwards (2003, p. 141-142) tells us, are 'antithetical if not an outright

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<sup>5</sup> A phrase commonly used by bloggers to express feelings of frustration (Urban Dictionary, 2009: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=le+sigh>)

oxymoron' for conventional men. *Lacero*'s post therefore, can be read as perhaps attempting to steer forum members away from discussing a potentially delicate category. *Simplistic* appears to read *Lacero*'s post in this way a by downplaying his investment in the topic, presenting his motivation as mundane: 'I'm bored' (5-6). However, *Homerjward*'s subsequent support to *Simplistic* ('don't worry': 7) and critique of *Lacero*'s inaccurate echoing of *edesignuk*'s previous post ('btw, lacero edesignuk didn't italicize "is it" and he flipped the two clauses in the 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence': 9-10) elicits an apology from *Lacero* (11), who then accounts for his dismissiveness of metrosexuality by categorising himself as a 'ditz' (14) (scatterbrain). What *Homerjward*'s response and *Lacero*'s subsequent apology achieve is to re-open a space for metrosexuality to be discussed.

*Sjpetry* seizes this opportunity by asking the question 'How about any closet metros?' (15). By invoking the category-bound activity of being in the 'closet' we are immediately provided with an association to other potentially relevant categories (e.g. gay men and women not disclosing their sexuality; see Silverman, 1998, p. 75). *Sjpetry*'s question does the work of suggesting that there are similarities between homosexuality and metrosexuality. The potential similarities of these two categories provides us with a clearer picture of why metrosexuality could be seen as breaching normative masculine codes of conduct (e.g. heterosexuality) (Connell, 1995) and occupy a 'troubled subject position' (Wetherell, 1998).

*Simplistic*'s subsequent post serves as a non-challenging response to *sjpetry* and presents as light-hearted self-mockery 'I used to be in the closet about it' (16). On the other hand, his display of unconventional predicates 'something dainty' (17) and 'tweasing my eyebrows' (18-19), which reportedly elicited 'weird looks from (his) parents' (17-18) who 'eventually stopped caring and I was teasing my



eyebrows without a care in the world!’ (17-19), also allows him to orientate his category-bound predicates as courageous, autonomous and individual in relation to conventional masculine norms. In short, *Simplistic* subtly positions himself as a ‘gender-rebel’ (Gill et al., 2005; Wetherell & Edley, 1999), and in doing so masculinises himself and makes participating in these potentially demeaning activities (in relation to heteronormative masculinity) seem heroic and alternative (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 350).

*Simplistic*’s reframing of his ‘metrosexual’ activities as masculine has not yet dispelled metrosexual associations with homosexuality as implied by *sjperty* (16), as evidenced by *Seasought*’s (and later *Simplistic*’s) subsequent posts. *Seasought*’s non-ascription to metrosexuality (‘I don’t believe I am’: 20) is followed by a short list that can be read as containing both presumed ‘metrosexual’ and ‘non-metrosexual’ predicates, or ‘contrast categories’ (Hester & Eglin, 1998, p. 138; Smith, 1978). That is, omitting the adverb ‘not’ from the first two items implies metrosexual predicates – I am terribly liberal and I am really into fashion (21-22). The third item, ‘a reasonable sense of taste’, if read in conjunction with Edwards (2003, p. 141-142) ‘antithetical’ claim about male style and vanity (see above), also suggests that ‘although metrosexuals are into fashion they do not have a sense of taste’. This tells us that metrosexual fashion is different, and perhaps distasteful, to more conventional men. But why would metrosexuals adopt non-normative category-bound activities and predicates, which have the potential to undermine their masculine identity? *Seasought*’s ascription to heterosexuality at the end of his post - ‘I am hetero, however’ (25) - provides a clue.

Through asserting his heterosexuality, *Seasought* directs us back to the associations between metrosexuality and homosexuality previously produced by

*Sjpetry*. Since sexual orientation cannot be ascertained for certain, these claims must rest on the assumption that the category-bounded activities of metrosexuality and homosexuality are alike or similar. And in a society that recognises gender binaries and heteronormativity as the standard, ‘metrosexuality’ and homosexuality must both have predicates that are considered feminine (Edwards, 2003; Harrison, 2008; Simpson, 2005).

*Simplistic* displays awareness of this conflation of the two categories, and responds with a heteronormative masculine defence: ‘I like the attention I get from being the way I am’ (27). *Simplistic*’s shifting categorizations of the type of women who give him attention, from ‘ladies’ (28) to ‘girls’ (29) is an interesting piece of rhetorical work. The selection of one category over another within the device ‘gender’ which includes the categories ‘ladies’ and ‘girls’ carries important implications for how the text is read. Edwards (1998, p. 25) argues that these categories carry ‘potentially useful conventional associations with age, marital status, and potential sexual availability’. Stokoe (2003, p. 331) suggests that when the category ‘girl’ is invoked, it ‘suggests frivolity, a lack of authority and purpose’ whereas ‘lady’ infers asexuality’. *Simplistic*’s post first describes the attention he gets as from ‘ladies’ but then selects the replacement category, ‘the girls’. The switch from ‘ladies’ to ‘girls’ functions to position him as not just visually appealing to the opposite sex but also sexually appealing to them. This ‘category, predicate and task’ (Hester & Elgin, 1997) serves to counter accusations of homosexuality from ‘being the way I am’ (27) as a member of a ‘disjunctive’ category (Schegloff, 2007, p. 469) and works to reconfigure metrosexual membership in heterosexual terms.

*Simplistic*’s post can also be seen as a critique of conventional masculinity by setting up the contrast pair (Smith, 1978) - looking good/not looking good. The

activity serves to hold conventional men and their masculinities accountable for their disinterest in self-presentation (in this case predicated on a pragmatic anti-fashion attitude to appearance – see Edwards, 2003) in terms of inferior self-respect. His critique goes a step further in his references to *mad jew* (26) who previously offered: ‘I wear collared shirts and I don’t drink beer’ as potential metrosexual predicates. Implied in this statement is that these category-bounded activities potentially belong to the category ‘metrosexual’ rather than more conventional masculinities. *Simplistic*, as a self-ascribed ‘metrosexual’, picks-up on ‘drinking’ (32) as a more conventional masculine category predicate along with ‘smoking’ (32) (see Edwards, 2003 ‘Sex, booze and fags’). These contrastive pairs form part of the set of modifications that are administered by metrosexual members to be able to recognise that someone involved in grooming and personal adornment for heterosexual reasons is ‘metrosexual’ and not any other ‘masculine category’.

*Simplistic*’s remasculinisation of his metrosexual activities and critique of conventional masculinities’ disinterest in self-presentation elicits an eager self-ascription to metrosexuality by *mkrishnan* ‘I am, I am!’ (35). What is also implied in his post is that *mkrishnan*’s subsequent comment, which claims non-participation in two metrosexual bounded activities (‘I need a manicure, and I haven’t seen my hair stylist’: 35-36), is that frequency of grooming activities may be a factor for metrosexual membership. Similarly to Vallis’s (2001) study of Internet chat rooms and Widdicombe and Woofitt’s (1990) interviews of with self-identified ‘punk’s, ‘rockers’, ‘gothics’ and ‘hippies’, this may also provide a means for other self-ascribing metrosexuals (and non-metrosexuals) in the forum to accord in-group status. That is, to police members relationships to self-presentation practices despite their positive orientations to metrosexuality.

Thus, so far, drawing on Baker's three-step process (1997, p. 142-143), the categories 'metrosexual' and 'homosexual' have been made relevant and equated in the talk, and since 'homosexual' is a marginalised category (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001), the normative category 'heterosexual men' is implied. This means that the two marginalised categories with the bounded predicate 'self-presentation' elicit moral judgements (Jayyusi, 1984) in order for members to be able to make sense of the social world. That is, all men must position themselves, and are positioned, in relation to 'hegemonic' norms (Connell, 1995). Non-normative activity participation therefore, requires metrosexuals to re-orientate membership in line with heterosexual norms (e.g. sexual prowess). However, although forum members have provided some clues as to metrosexual category-bound activities and predicates, we do not yet have a clear understanding of the category's parameters. It is the negotiation of these that the analysis will now turn to.

### **Negotiating category-bound activities**

Since 'metrosexual' is a relatively new identity category, forum members negotiated candidate identity characteristics. The following two sequences of talk were the first sustained attempts to define what exactly constituted 'being metrosexual'.

Extract 2

*Raggedjimmi* 11-26-2005, 09:12 am

- 38 I don't know what I am. a blend of country boy and metrosexual  
39 perhaps? God knows. I don't drink, I like outdoors activities, I like  
40 fashion, I like to be clean, smell nice etc, im very eccentric. I'm

41 my own style I suppose

---

*mkrishnan* 11-26-2005, 09:26 am Ref: Lines 95-98

42 Let's see if you classify as a Manchester Metrosexual, do you:

43 -Hang out in Living Room/Canal Street

44 -Have a mullet/fin

45 -Shop frequently in Flannels/Diesel

46 -Think "distressed" is still in

47 -Go to tanning salons/apply St Tropez

48 If you tick 4/5 then you can probably say yes

---

*clayj* 11-26-2005, 09:43 am

49 What we really need is a list of things that qualify you as a

50 metrosexual. I'll start it off:

51 - You wash with anything beyond bar soap and shampoo in the

52 shower.

53 - You get a manicure and/or a pedicure more than once a decade.

54 - You've EVER been called "pretty boy".

55 - You apply any sort of skin conditioning lotion on a semi-regular

56 basis.

57 - You spend more than 10 minutes a day grooming.

58 - You pay more than \$30 for a haircut.

59 - You have hair coloring applied. (Exception: Eliminating grey

60 doesn't make you metrosexual, it just makes you insecure about

61 getting old. Adding "accents" to your hair DEFINITELY makes

- 62 you metrosexual.)
- 63 - You wear ornately decorated shirts. (Usually these are button
- 64 down shirts with excessively-complicated designs and/or paisley.)
- 65 - If a woman calls you a metrosexual, you are.

Drawing on Hester and Eglin's (1997) 'category, predicate and task' we can see that *Raggedjimmy*'s specific task in his opening his post is to find out from other forum members, with presumably more category identity knowledge than him, whether he belongs in any of the three distinct categories 'country boy', 'metrosexual' (38) or individualist ('my own style': 40-41). One way for others to assign category membership is to offer candidate category-bound activities (see Vallis, 2001, p. 90), such as 'I don't drink, I like outdoors activities, I like fashion, I like to be clean, smell nice etc, im very eccentric' (39-40). However, *Mkrishnan* or *Clayj* do not undertake a category assignment of *Raggedjimmy*. Instead, both respondents provide quite distinct and extensive, if not humorous, lists of metrosexual category-bound activities and predicates for which *Raggedjimmy* (and other forum members) could orientate to and self-ascribe. Jefferson's (1991, p. 68) work on listing suggests that hearers (and speakers) are able to use lists as an 'orientated-to-procedure'. In other words, it provides the hearer with a means to discursively position themselves in relation to the items on the list. Moreover, it also provides a means for other forum members, whether metrosexual or not, to accord group status and police members' positive orientations to metrosexuality (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1990; see also Vallis, 2001 for other on-line, non-metrosexual examples).

*Mkrishnan*'s response seems to poke fun at *Raggedjimmy*'s request for category categorisation by his ironic question 'Let's see if you classify as a

Manchester Metrosexual' (42). One reasonable prerequisite of metrosexuality is 'living in or within easy reach of a metropolis' (Simpson, 2002, p. 2), and *Raggedjimmi*'s reference to 'country boy' provides for a possible hearing that he is a non-urban dweller and specifically not a 'Manchester Metrosexual'. Furthermore, one feature of the device 'types' (e.g. 'types of metrosexual' implied by *Raggedjimmi*'s 'my own style' and *mkrishnan*'s 'Manchester Metrosexual') is that such characterisations can elicit humour (Benwell & Stokoe, 2003, p. 198; Vallis, 2001, p. 95). That is, it serves as a distancing strategy for category members (e.g. *mkrishnan* - extract 1) which separates them from those aspiring to or uncertain of their metrosexual category membership (e.g. *Raggedjimmi* - extract 2). In other words, 'real' metrosexuals would not need to ask for membership clarification. Therefore, *mkrishnan*'s deployment of 'humour' implicates *Raggedjimmi* as a disjunctive category member or 'phony' (Sacks, 1992, p. 581). *Clayj*, on the other hand, rather than distancing other forum members from possible membership ascription, orientates the talk back to a more serious level 'What we really need is a list of things that qualify you as a metrosexual. I'll start it off' (49-50).

*Clayj* offers an extensive nine-part list featuring fashion and grooming activities (51-65), which serves as a resource to normalise these activities as category-generated features of metrosexual membership. Like *Seasought*'s post (extract 1) –reading each item in the negative (e.g. You don't' etc.) – also provides a resource for defining (for *clayj*) the category-bound activities of conventional men. Moreover, *Clayj*'s list items are perhaps also a partial recycling of the candidate activities provided in previous sequences in the talk (see Jefferson, 1991, p. 89) – *Simplistic*'s 'tweasing my eyebrows', *Seasought*'s 'fashion' and *Raggedjimmi*'s 'fashion' and personal hygiene 'I like to be clean, smell nice etc'. Frequently implied

activities grouped around the category ‘metrosexual’ reinforce the tie between ‘metrosexuality’ and the predicate ‘concern with self-presentation’. Yet as Edwards (2003, p. 141-142) has pointed out, activities such these are conventionally tied to the category ‘women’. Therefore, like *Simplistic*’s fourth post (extract 1), *clayj* culminates his post by making reference to categorisation by women. This may suggest that women are experts on identification of the types of activities metrosexuals perform, and/or serve, like *Simplistic*’s post, as a warrant for warding off potential accusations of homosexuality by justifying these activities as undertaken for heterosexual prowess, thereby effectively re-masculinising these predicates.

The posts presented in extract 2 provide a clearer insight into specific metrosexual-bounded activities and predicates, centred on notions of self-presentation. However, also evident from *mkrishnan*’s post was the in-group and out-group policing of category membership through the deployment of ‘humour’, thus also giving a clear indication that ‘metrosexual’, along with other categories such as ‘homosexual’, is a marginalised category. That is, like the analysis of extract 1, metrosexuality presents as at odds with conventional men and masculinity, such that justification for non-normative activities need to be hedged in heteronormative ways. A similar manoeuvring tactic is also evident in the following extract. However, what is also interesting about this extract is the discussion that centres on whether men’s concern for self-presentation is only an attribute of metrosexuality.

### Extract 3

*CompUser* 11-26-2005, 10:02 am

66 My friend (who is a girl) always calls me metro all the time. I

67 don’t know how it does but it seems to be frequently. She also has



68 called me a “Perfect, pretty boy”. Apparently its a good thing  
69 according to her. I don’t use special soaps and lotions. Nor do I go  
70 off and a manicures and such. She makes this judgment because I  
71 wear more expensive cloths such as ones from mainly  
72 Abercrombie & Fitch, Polo, and J. Crew, probably considered 3  
73 prime examples of preppy stores. Most of my shirts are either Polo,  
74 Long sleeve non colored shirts

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*Plymouthbreezer* 11-26-2005, 11:37am Ref: Lines 127-137

75 Hah, me too! Lots of girls (and guys) call me “really preppy” and  
76 a few less have called me metro. I guess it’s because I have  
77 obsessive compulsive disorder, and am quite eccentric by many  
78 kids standards. I’m an artist, love theater and acting, dress nicely,  
79 enjoy expensive things (I use Macs...Lol), have a good friend  
80 who’s gay, I hate George Bush, and tend to get along with girls  
81 who never seem to want to go out with me - and all of which  
82 usually goes hand in hand with being either gay or metrosexual.  
83 But, I’m not gay, so I guess I must be metro, although I hear the  
84 correct term these days is “Ubersexual.” Anyway, it’s frustrating  
85 when people call me gay (not that I have a problem with  
86 homosexuals at all) just because I am... Uhh... More “refined” than  
87 most kids (I’m 15, 16 next month) today.

*CompUser*’s relays the category work undertaken by his ‘friend (who is a girl)’ (66) ‘always calls me metro all the time’. Like *Simplistic*’s post (extract 1), the significance of invoking the category ‘girl’ (see Stokoe, 2003, p. 331) sets any

following talk in heteronormative terms and wards off potential charges of effeminacy or homosexuality. Further warrant for this can be garnered from *CompUser*'s claim that this 'girl' calls him 'Perfect, pretty boy' (68), which introduces attractiveness as a metrosexual attribute as identified by 'women'. But, this disrupts conventional modes of looking where 'men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at' (Berger, 1972, p. 47). Talk of male attractiveness risks charges of effeminacy even though heterosexuality has already been implied. *CompUser* deals with this by offering the disclaimer: 'Apparently it's a good thing according to her' (68-69). In other words, he distances himself from his friend's categorisation. Distancing can also be deduced from his invoking of the category 'preppy' implied from his consumption choices e.g. shopping in 'preppy stores' (73), and activities e.g. 'I don't use special soaps and lotions. Nor do I go off and a manicures and such' (69-70). As seen in extracts 1 and 2 (e.g. *clayj*'s list), conventional men and masculinities disassociate with grooming practices and fashion (also see Edwards, 2003). Therefore *CompUser* achieves distance from metrosexuality by his professed disinterest in grooming activities, whilst at the same time also disassociating himself from conventional men's disinterest in fashion. In other words, his task (Hester & Eglin, 1997) in implying membership of the category 'preppy' is to position him as a man with self-respect via his activities (clothing consumption), whilst at the same time retaining conventional gender demarcation in the realm of grooming.

*Plymouthbreezer* responds to *CompUser* with recognition of being positioned in a similar way (75-76). Interestingly, *Plymouthbreezer* accounts for other's categorisation of him as metrosexual or 'really preppy' by categorising himself as having mental health issues ('obsessive compulsive disorder', 77), which accounts

for his unconventional 'eccentric' behaviours. Being 'eccentric' was also a category invoked by *Seasought* (extract 1: 23), and *Raggedjimmy* (extract 2: 40), which also works as a disclaimer for their participation in typically feminised activities (Edwards, 2006). For *Plymouthbreezer*, this strategy also allows him to justify his lack of success with girls 'who never seem to want to go out with me' (80-81). Understanding that his activities may be perceived as homosexual ('all of which usually go hand in hand with being gay or metrosexual', 81-82), *Plymouthbreezer* explicitly wards off such charges with 'I am not gay, so I guess I must be metro' (83), followed by a re-categorisation of himself as possibly 'ubersexual' (84) (see Salzman et al., 2005, p. 167). Moving back and forth between the various categories to which he partially ascribes - 'Lots of girls (and guys call me 'really preppy'' (75-76), 'so I guess I must be metro' (83) and 'Ubersexual' (84) - directs our attention back to the difficulty those who participate in non-conventional category-bounded activities face in constructing a suitable or coherent gendered identity. This also clearly demonstrates the difficulty those ascribing to media and marketing produced categories have in collectively stabilising the meaning of what constitutes membership of those categories. Indeed, the media and marketing origins of metrosexuality are made explicit in the following extract. What is also interesting about the following extract is how those origins can be used as disclaiming and distancing strategies.

### **Distancing strategies**

Given the potential for 'metrosexual' to be interpreted as 'homosexual' as we showed in extract 1, many forum participants deployed distancing strategies to inoculate

against potential charges of ‘homosexuality’.

Extract 4

*Davey* 11-26-2005, 12:28 pm

88 I would be lying to myself if I didn't raise my hand to this. I think  
89 my cousin got me caught into the whole metro thing. I remember  
90 seeing a story on 60minutes about it. Anyways I admit to the hair,  
91 expensive clothing, tweasers, shaving, more than one kind of soap,  
92 and various face washes. I can't stand to wear last years clothing,  
93 loose clothing, and t- shirts w/ baseball cap worn everywhere is  
94 NOT my style. I go for distressed jeans, button down shirt, and  
95 jacket. Why is it bad to care how you look?

*Davey's* ascription to ‘metrosexuality’ (88) presents ‘metrosexuality’ as a contemporary media and marketing produced masculine identity. Warrant for this can be garnered from his reference to ‘metrosexuality’ being discussed as a topic on the U.S. Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) television newsmagazine<sup>6</sup> ‘I remember seeing a story on 60minutes about it’ (89-0), and his list of consumption-based activities e.g. ‘expensive clothing’, ‘various face washes’ (90-92). As seen in the previous posts (also see Edwards, 2003), there is a risk in ascribing to these category-bound activities and predicates - being charged with effeminacy, narcissism or homosexuality. *Davey* deals with this, in part, by attributing some responsibility for his actions to his cousin ‘my cousin got me caught into the whole metro thing’ (89) and CBS’s broadcast (90) (see Silverman, 2006 for how texts influence the way

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<sup>6</sup> CBS 60 Minutes <http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/60minutes/main3415.shtml>

people see the world and how they should act). His discursive work therefore can be seen to legitimise and position metrosexuality as a popular identity, whilst at the same time serving as a distancing strategy from a potentially troubled identity - 'Why is it bad to care how you look? (95) - that sits in contrast to conventional masculinity (Wetherell, 1998).

As with extracts 1 and 2, *Davey*'s listing of category-bounded activities (90-92) discredit more conventional heteronormative masculine features: 'wear(ing) last years clothing, loose clothing, and t-shirts w/ baseball cap worn everywhere' (92-94). These category-bound activities serve to question normative masculine disinterest in self-presentation and act as a critique of its presumed low level of self-respect. Gill et al.'s (2005, p. 54-6) semi-structured interview research with British men found that self-respect was a specific masculine characteristic cherished by their participants. Those men who failed to demonstrate self-respect were frequently criticised. *Davey*'s orientation to self-respect via self-presentation practices positions 'metrosexuality' in more conventional masculine terms. Furthermore, like *Simplistic* (extract 1), *Davey* can also be seen as a 'gender-rebel' (Gill et al., 2005; Wetherell & Edley, 1999) for his non-normative category-bound activities and predicates.

In the final extract, the contributor explicitly draws upon the marketed aspect of metrosexuality to define membership. It should be recalled that in extract three *CompUser* was not ascribing to metrosexuality and had in fact disavowed membership based on his non-participation in grooming activities (69-70), even though his friend had reputedly positioned him as metrosexual (66). However, in extract five *CompUser* presents uncertainty over which category applies to him: 'really preppy' or 'metrosexual' (90). At this point Matt steps in to offer advice based

on the consumption of specific brands.

Extract 5

*CompUser* 11-27-2005, 04:29 pm

90 Is some one considered “really preppy” such as I also metro?

---

*Matt* 11-27-2005, 04:41 pm Ref: Line 357

91 well, you’re doubting your fashion sexuality are you not? if there is

92 a doubt, the answer is always yes just posting in this thread made

93 you metro...welcome...i am definitely metro... professional

94 shampoo/conditioner/hair gel...algae facial treatments and other

95 nice skin moisturizers...PowerBook G4 shop at Banana Republic,

96 Diesel, Calvin Klein, Armani Exchange...boxer briefs

97 manicures/pedicures Tumi backpack Prada and Gucci eyewear

98 Pottery Barn furniture (ultra suede comforter = the ticket) wow...it

99 feels good to be out of the...uhhh walk-in closet girls love

100 metros...who doesn’t like invites to 100 shop with them at

101 victoria’s secret

*Matt* opens his post with a fascinating mixture of references to *CompUser*'s queries about fashion and broader references to sexuality (‘fashion sexuality’, 91). The purpose in using humour at the outset denies other contributors the ability to hold him completely accountable for his subsequent metrosexual ascription (91-92). As previously noted, a ‘stylish’ man can pose problems for those invested in hegemonic masculinities (Edwards, 2003), and so ‘ambiguous masculinities’ such as

metrosexuality, which contravene the ‘symbolism of difference’ (Connell, 1995, p. 223) are often deployed with humour, which serves as a distancing strategy (Benwell, 2003, p. 156).

*Matt* continues by affirming *CompUser*’s ascription to metrosexuality and claims that ‘just posting in this thread made you metro...welcome...’ (92-93). This can be read as either: metrosexuals would only discuss metrosexuality in a forum about metrosexuality, or that purchasers of Apple Mac computers (those who participate in MacRumours threads) are by virtue of their consumption, ‘metrosexual’. The more likely interpretation is that *Matt* is referring to the consumption of Apple hardware ‘PowerBook G4’ (95), which lays the ground for his subsequent list of consumer brands for category identification (95-98) (Silverman, 2006). Listing apparent metrosexual brands gives contributors yet another device in which to orientate to metrosexuality (Jefferson, 1991, p. 68), and at the same time normalises the consumption practices of metrosexuals. Noticeable also is that *Matt* concludes his post by making reference to ‘girls’ (99), a strategy also previously employed by *Simplistic* (extract one) and *Clayj* (extract two) in order to reframe metrosexuality in masculine ways that draw on self-respect and sexual prowess.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The analysis clearly indicates that there is a lot at stake for self-ascribing metrosexuals - as is the case for anybody ascribing to a marginalised identity (Edwards, 2006). The power of established gendered knowledge clearly makes it difficult to identify with and invest in emerging and potentially subversive categories like metrosexual – we know that members of alternative categories risk being

castigated as ‘defective or ‘phony’ (Sacks, 1992). The data highlight the continued force of hegemonic masculinities, since on the one hand metrosexuality was critiqued and rejected as non-masculine (hence accusations of homosexuality, effeminacy and narcissism), while on the other self-identifying metrosexuals invoked conventional masculinity signifiers in the process of their identity work (heterosexual prowess, self-respect etc.). Metrosexual avowal walks a fine line between rejecting traditional masculinised practices (e.g. disinterest in appearance) and invoking other masculinised ideals (e.g. autonomy, self-discipline).

As well as highlighting the gendered discursive resources informing identity construction, my analysis also attended to the discursive practices used in this process. I showed, for example, the deployment of listing (Jefferson, 1991) as a strategy for orienting to metrosexuality, allowing contributors to move towards and against the metrosexual label in dynamic ways. I showed also the use of terms such as ‘style’ and ‘fashion’, which facilitated a temporary identification with metrosexuality – one that could be discarded if critique becomes excessive. The use of irony and humour was also widespread (see Benwell, 2004), again providing inoculation against charges of effeminacy or vanity. Attention to discursive practices as well as resources thus illuminates the shifting and sophisticated manoeuvres involved in claiming and rejecting metrosexual (and masculine) identities.

My analysis moved beyond the media representations of metrosexuality (Simpson, 1994, 2002) and the analysis of magazine masculinities (e.g. Edwards, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) by offering additional insights and a greater depth into the dynamics of metrosexual (dis-)identification than Study 1. Further, my analysis underlines the continued influence of hegemonic masculinities in the construction (and rejection) of supposedly ‘new’, ‘modern’ or ‘alternative’ forms of



masculinity. I question claims about the deconstruction of, or resistance to, culturally embedded masculine signifiers and the idea that conventional or ‘hegemonic’ (Connell, 1995) forms of masculinity are, or have been, superseded (MacInnes, 2001). Yet what does appear to be evident is that some masculinities now appear to be modernised in line with changes in contemporary consumption practices.

This analysis fits with other work as indicated in Chapter 1, which maintains that men’s forays into hitherto feminized domains (beauty, health, care etc.) is invariably accompanied by a masculinized reframing (or even critique) of the practice in question (see Harrison 2008; Gough 2007; Gill et al. 2005; Edwards, 2003), and/or an assertion of one’s masculinity credentials with respect to other domains (see e.g. de Visser 2008). This work implies that hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) remain culturally available and influential for (some) men (with reference to sexual performance, self-respect, autonomy, etc.) – but this is not to suggest that the meanings around such masculinities are fixed, or that their deployment is predictable or mechanistic. Rather, the analysis foregrounds the complex and dynamic ways in which masculinities are negotiated in the context of metrosexuality, and further advertises the value of attending to discursive resources and practices in this field (see also Wetherell & Edley 1999).

Having identified some of the candidate ‘metrosexual’ activities, I now turn to examine ‘metrosexual’ use of facial cosmetics; considered one of the more-extreme aspects of this identity (Harrison, 2008).

## **5. Study 3**

### **‘I’m METRO, NOT gay!’: men’s accounts of makeup use on You Tube**

In this study I examine male makeup users’ responses to a young man’s online makeup tutorial posted on YouTube. In particular I focus on how the video creator and the respondents design and manage the accounts of their activities, paying particular attention to those gendered norms and categories invoked. What can be seen is that when contributors endorse or reference cosmetic use they invariably attempt to inoculate themselves against potential charges of being ‘gay’; the analysis highlights the strategies used to manage gender and sexual identities. In addition, I discuss the implications of the analysis for mapping contemporary masculinities.

#### **The Modern Man**

Modern men, it seems, are fascinated with their appearance, investing time and money in their personal appearance, through diet and lifestyle choices, fitness regimes, and the purchase of consumer goods, including clothing, accessories, and cosmetics. In light of such trends, I examine the way men who use cosmetics discuss their use of such products in response to an online makeup tutorial on YouTube. Drawing on a selection of the 334 written posts to a makeup tutorial, I focus on the design and management of these responses, with reference to the gendered norms and identities invoked.

My aims then in this paper are twofold. Firstly, by examining a selection of men's own accounts of their use of cosmetics I aim to contribute to the emergent body of literature on 'metrosexuality.' The majority of studies on this phenomenon have been largely theoretical. For example, Miller (2006, 2009) studied trends in men's consumption practices in the U.S. have been a result of changing demands in the labor market, where employers have attempted to commodify the male body. Coad (2008), on the other hand, argued that the marketing of high profile sports celebrities, are responsible for encouraging heterosexual men to 'engage in practices stereotypically associated with femininity and homosexuality, such as care for appearance and the latest fashion trends' (p. 73). The impact of 'metrosexuality' on gender and sexualities has been question by some. For example Carniel's (2009) study of 'metrosexuality' and Australian soccer found that although men were now more image-conscious, spurred on by the consumption practices of sporting celebrities, masculinities on display were in effect hybridizations of existing masculinities. In other words: 'While metrosexuality re-socializes men as consumers, it does not necessarily alter other fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity' (2009, p. 81) because existing discourses of masculinity which favor heterosexuality, strength, violence, risk taking and so on are still readily available and frequently drawn upon.

Notwithstanding the insights into metrosexual phenomena offered by these studies, we know little how self-identified 'metrosexuals' construct this identity for themselves. Furthermore, these studies are largely analyst-centered sociological interpretations of the phenomenon, presenting 'metrosexuality' as a predefined given. I, on the other hand, take a different stance i.e., that identity categories, such as 'metrosexual,' are an 'emergent feature' of social interactions (Kessler & McKenna,

1978; Stokoe, 2003, 2010; West & Fenstermaker, 1993). From this perspective, identity is not presumed in advance of analysis; rather identities and identity characteristics only becomes relevant if the participants within the interaction make it so. In other words, identity only becomes relevant for the interaction if the participants are orienting to identities and their features; if not, as Schegloff (1997) argues, analysts do not have grounds for making identity claims.

Various researchers have produced analyses of category use within interactions (see Stokoe, 2006). For example, D. Edwards' (1998) conversational analysis of a couple's counseling session highlighted how the gendered terms 'girls' and 'married women' were invoked to support claims. In this case, the use of the category 'girl' was used to downgrade status to '... an unattached, unmarried, available, possibly young, female' (p. 25), whereas the category 'married women' was used to upgrade status to 'respectable' and 'unavailable.' Edwards was at pains to point out that identity categories such as these '... are not merely factual, or even value-laden observations that have an automatic relevance to people's conversations' (p. 20). Instead, we should look for the actions these identity categories are designed to achieve. I follow this perspective when I analyze how our respondents design and manage their descriptions of makeup use.

My second aim is to contribute to the relatively underdeveloped field of studies on identities in online contexts. Some analysts (Epstein, 2007; Wiszniewski & Coyne, 2002) suggest that online identities are unreliable, whilst others (Coyle & MacWhannell, 2002; Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003) argue that computer-mediated communication creates the same 'real' identities as those expressed in offline communications via the disclosure of shared experiences, knowledge, meanings and positions with those who have membership entitlement within the

same electronic space.

I, on the other hand, step aside from arguments about ‘real’ online identities, instead arguing that identities are constructed in interaction (both on- and off-line) (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Therefore, as I have already noted, it is the analysts job to adopt a stance of ‘unmotivated looking’ (Psathas, 1995) when analyzing data. In this way we can make claims about the relevance of these types of identity, precisely because it is grounded in what the speakers say and do. To do this, I use a discursive approach, which draws upon insights from Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1998) and Membership Categorization Analysis (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007).

## **Data**

The dataset is drawn from the premier Internet video publisher YouTube (Nielsen, 2009). Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows people to easily upload and share video clips on a range of topics including those claimed to be associated with men’s grooming such as ‘body hair removal,’ ‘manicures,’ ‘fashion and style,’ ‘cosmetic application’ and other similar activities. Since men’s cosmetic use, other than for TV, fancy dress, drag and other such activities, is considered one of the more extreme forms of men’s grooming (Harrison, 2008, p. 57), I selected one particular video that displayed a young man taking viewers through his daily makeup routine. This video was the most popular non-make-up artist tutorials, boasting a total of 30,133 views (and average of 35 a day since November 2008) along with 334 written comments (as of 03/05/11). Of those comments from self-identified cosmetic users, seven were particularly interesting for the ways in which they used makeup or accounted for

makeup use by drawing on typical masculine markers such as heterosexual prowess.

As with other online sites, YouTube provides viewers with the ability to engage with the material they encounter through the computer-mediated communication channels - text and video comments. These allow viewers to write comments on, rate, and make video responses to their favorite videos, whilst also providing the maker(s) of the videos with a means to respond to viewer's questions. The use of this type of video material in ethnomethodological research poses the problem of 'data reproducibility' as, unlike written texts, it cannot be reproduced on the printed page. Francis and Hart (1997, p. 130) highlight this issue:

A distinctive feature of ethnomethodology and conversation analytic inquiry is a commitment to the reproduction of materials, in order that fine grained analysis may be conducted in a way which provides the reader with access to the detail of the phenomena.

Although this has the potential to raise concerns over the veracity of the analysis, since I cannot reproduce the video in this paper for readers to see, this issue is avoided within this particular analytical inquiry since the focus of the research is directed to the written and reproducible comments of the viewers. I anonymise the online talk by removing personal tags and replacing them with 'video creator' (VC) and 'respondent' (R1-7). I did this in order to avoid disclosing personal details since some respondents' and the video creator have hyperlinks to their own YouTube webpage. However, personal consent was not sought since our data is public ally available and the majority of respondents provided no contact details. I present the

extracts of talk in full as they appear on YouTube including spelling mistakes, colloquial language and other electronic forms of notation (e.g., underscores), albeit with the addition of line numbers for ease of analysis.

## **Method**

In analyzing the electronic talk, I identified one main issue for the video creator and the respondents. The number of orientations to heterosexual status ('speaking as a straight guy'; 'I'm METRO, NOT gay,' etc.), suggest a concern that cosmetic use might attract charges of homosexuality. In each example I analyzed how the respondents worked up, orientated to, and managed their descriptions in relation to gendered norms and identities, identifying the significance of discursive phenomena such as listing (Jefferson, 1991), extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), nonextreme generalizations (D. Edwards, 2000), greetings (Sacks, 1992) and so on. In combination with these conversation analytical insights I drew on Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992).

## **Analysis**

I begin my data analysis by focusing on VC's written text, which accompanies his video, since this piece of text sets up the context for viewing the video and any subsequent talk.

## The original post

VC

- 1 Hey
- 2 This video's just basically my face routine that i go through almost
- 3 every morning. Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup is
- 4 because of acne and some scarring and also redness. No, my face is
- 5 usually not as red as it was in the beginning of the video; it was
- 6 like that because i had exfoliated my face right before turning on
- 7 the cam.
- 8 Products used:
- 9 Eucerin- everyday protection face lotion SPF 30 Almay
- 10 - Clear complexion concealer in "light 100"
- 11 - Clear complexion makeup in "Naked" Covergirl
- 12 - Clean fragrance free pressed powder in "250, Creamy beige" and
- 13 some Covergirl sponges. btw, I'm METRO, NOT gay!

The first thing to notice in this extract is VC's choice of greeting 'Hey' (1). Sacks (1992, p. 4) identified a procedural rule for greetings, '...a person who speaks first...can choose their form of address, and in choosing their form of address they can thereby choose the form of address the other uses'. In other words, exchanges tend to occur in pairs, so that if someone says 'Hey' the response will most likely be 'Hey'. The use of a casual greeting 'Hey' then sets the tone and context of this introductory text and video to be read and seen by the audience in a casual non-serious manner. The other thing to notice about VC's use of 'Hey' is that VC doesn't choose to address anybody specifically. Given that VC could have opted for a range



of other candidate greetings to address particular types of person e.g. ‘guys/girls’ with the greeting ‘hey guys/girls’, or indeed none at all, all of which would not seem out of place, it is evident that VC’s expectation is that the video could possibly be viewed by anybody. Now the relevance of these preliminary observations becomes clearer when I examine the remainder of VC’s introductory text.

VC’s description of his video ‘This video’s just basically my face routine that i go through almost every morning’ (2-3) contains the downgrade ‘just basically’. Downgrades and upgrades - extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) - are ways of referring to events and objects by invoking minimal or maximal properties. What this does is reduce the basis for others to search for an account. Pomerantz’s (1986, p. 219-220) work showed that people use extreme-case formulations in adversarial situations and when they anticipate others undermining their claims or to propose that some behaviour is not wrong (or is right) especially if it can be regarded as frequently occurring. Or, as Potter (1996, p. 61) points out, accounts are often provided for dispreferred actions, so that if an action is not the preferred action of the actor then a reason for such action may be required. Therefore, VCs use of ‘just basically’ rather than saying ‘This video is my...’ in the description, proposes that VC ‘should not’ have to offer an account for using makeup. However, VC does anticipate that some viewers may still need an account, and so provides a justification for his use of makeup use: ‘Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup is because of acne and some scaring and also redness’ (3-4).

In providing such an account VC is signaling that his makeup use will ‘trouble’ some viewers referenced specifically as ‘you’ (3). ‘You’, as Sacks (1992, p. 163-168) points out, simultaneously references both ‘you’ (you alone) or ‘you’ (you and others)’ (1992, p. 165). What this implies then, is that VC is directing the account

at individual viewers as members of a category of people who may object to his makeup use. Although we cannot be sure what sort of category that is, VC's response '...because of acne and some scaring and also redness' does imply that this category of people do not object to makeup use by men who use it to cover facial defects. Note also that this is a three-part list 'acne', 'scaring' and 'redness'. As Jefferson (1991) showed, the presence of three items on a list adds clarity and weight to arguments. In other words, strength by numbers. Therefore, VC's list helps support and strengthen his account in the presence of potential discord or criticism. VC's response can therefore be read as an attempt to inoculate himself (Potter, 1996) from charges of wearing cosmetics for reasons other than to cover facial defects - presumably beautification. This is further grounded by the implication that this is a necessary daily procedure. However, although VC uses this tactic as a deterrent to ward off potential criticisms, he is careful to minimize the extent of his facial defects in his second pre-emptive response: 'No, my face is usually not as red as it was in the beginning of the video; it was like that because i had exfoliated my face right before turning on the cam' (4-7). Such minimization works in two ways. Firstly, it avoids having to provide a further account for why VC has such skin problems (potentially from the use of cosmetics), and secondly, too much emphasis on skin defects risks excluding some viewers who do not have facial skin defects. Put simply, if a YouTube user wants to reach the widest possible audience, then narrowing the scope of the video limits that possibility.

Having attempted to avoid potential 'trouble' so far, VC counters this possibility further in the list of the products used. What is immediately evident is that the list, which can be summarized as moisturizer, concealer, foundation and face powder, is limited in scope to coverage products rather than products for

beautification, such as lipstick, eyeliner, mascara, rouge and so on. What's also interesting is that these products are presented with pragmatic and technical features (e.g. 'everyday protection', 'complexion concealer', 'fragrance free'), along with a throwaway reference to Covergirl sponges as if to sweep these beautification items under the carpet (see Harrison, 2008 for other examples of the masculinisation of makeup).

A final observation: VC self- categorises himself as 'METRO', but 'NOT gay' (13). In doing so VC makes relevant the MCD (Sacks, 1974; 1992) 'types of men'. Although in this collection, two types of men are explicitly stated - 'metrosexual' and 'gay' - VC's disclaimers 'Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup' (3) and 'I'm...NOT gay' imply another (unspoken) category of 'men', one whose members are neither gay nor makeup users. This sets up a first contrast pair (Smith, 1978) based on sexuality i.e. 'straight/gay'. The MCD 'heterosexual men' is also invoked, providing a second contrast pair centered on activity: 'makeup user/non-makeup user'. Since VC also provided an account of the reason for using cosmetics we can see that the category 'straight men' with the activity 'makeup use' may become recategorized as 'gay'.

Rather than risk being categorised as 'gay', VC pre-emptively categorises himself as 'metrosexual'. Such an undertaking demonstrates how the conventional rules for applying categories, activities and predicates can be transformed and revised (Speer, 2005, p. 120), but also create new identity categories. In this undertaking VC also shows us one aspect of the parameters of this new identity category – heterosexual men who wear cosmetics can be categorised 'metrosexual'. Of course, not all heterosexual men who wear cosmetics may warrant being categorized as 'metrosexual' (e.g. fancy dress, TV personalities, movie stars on so on). Where the

categorization of ‘metrosexual’ becomes relevant can be seen by VC’s statement ‘This video’s just basically my face routine that i go though almost every morning’ (2-3). This indicates that one of the category-features of ‘metrosexuality’ is about straight men applying makeup ‘almost every morning’ and not simply in a specific environment or context.

What is also interesting is to note is the way in which VC indexes and occasions his video and any subsequent talk. As Antaki and Widdicombe (1998, p. 4) point out, once a person has self-identified by making a category relevant it is difficult to understand any further utterances by that person without referencing the category they have made relevant. Since VC has already self-identified as ‘metrosexual’, a significant part of the meaning of such can be ‘found in the occasion of its production’ (1998, p. 4). In other words, self-classifying as ‘metrosexual’ indexes and occasions all responses as either ‘metrosexual’ or ‘non-metrosexual’; those respondents who self-identify as makeup users are treatable as ‘metrosexual’ responses even though this category may not necessarily be ‘named out aloud. I now turn to examine some of these responses.

### **Viewers’ responses: Emphasizing discretion**

Respondent 1

- 14 Overall, good routine. I think that maybe a bit more contouring such
- 15 as bringing out the tops of your cheek bones the middle of your nose
- 16 and your chin and forehead would make it a more masculine look.
- 17 and darkening under the cheekbones and on the sides of the nose and
- 18 up to the inside of the eyebrow would make you look more chiseled.

19 :) Maybe you wouldn't want it that way though. :) glad I'm not the  
20 only dude who wears makeup

Constructive, but critical, assessments of people and objects can be received as offensive. So, those issuing constructive criticism must carefully manage the presentation of their assessment if they are to successfully get their point 'over' without alienating the recipient. R1's assessment of VC's makeup regime does this in a number of ways. Firstly, it begins with the generalized comment 'Overall, good routine'. Words such as 'overall', 'almost', 'mostly' and so on, are qualified, but weaker or softer versions of extreme-case formulations - nonextreme generalizations. Edwards (2000, p. 352) notes that words like 'overall' are deployed instead of much stronger versions such as 'every' and 'all' because they are more robust to challenges. That is, they provide a space for some disagreement or difference. The 'Overall' in R1's initial response works to establish a positive ground for the critique to come. The use of positive nonextreme generalizations fit nicely with dispreferred responses, offering some kind of upshot or token appreciation before the negative tone of the response is mitigated (Kitzinger, 2000).

R1 further softens the response with the personalized 'I think' and with the use of 'maybe' (14), which is then restated in the disclaimer 'Maybe you wouldn't want it that way though' (19) thus allowing that others, especially VC, may not agree. A visual dimension is also added to emphasis this point with the inclusion of smilies. Emoticons such as smilies are used in computer-mediated communication in the absence of non-verbal cues found in face-to-face communication. The poster may position an emoticon in text where they want the recipient to follow an emotional response, much like the insertion of laughter tracks by producers of television

situation comedies where humour is not necessarily obvious (Provine, et al., 2007). In R1's text the smilies can be seen to work as an attempt to elicit a positive emotional response in the presence of the critique.

R1's critical assessment of VC's cosmetic application is divided into two parts. R1's initial generalised prescription for 'a more masculine look' (16) centers on listing facial features: 'cheek bones', 'nose', 'chin' and 'forehead' for 'contouring'. The quantity and specificity of the named facial features for 'contouring' in R1's list add strength to his prescription (see Jefferson, 1991). But R1 is at pains to emphasize the point of a 'masculine look', and does so by reiterating, but this time with more specific detail on 'contouring' to bring off the 'masculine look', except this time the 'masculine look' is reformulated to 'look more chiseled'. The reformulation here works to provide a candidate characteristic of how to identify the 'masculine look', but also strengthen R1's critique, which implies VC's style of cosmetic application as potentially 'less masculine'. R1's orientation to gender suggests differentiation in the way wo/men 'ought' to apply makeup and that there is the potential for 'trouble' if such methods are not adhered to. This can be read in conjunction with VC's introductory text, which implied that makeup use by men can result in being categorized as 'gay' rather than 'metrosexual'.

Since the gender of respondents may be difficult to ascertain in electronic discourse due to anonymity with tags, the force of the prescription for the 'masculine look' may be lessened if R1's gender is not made relevant. In other words, VC may not take seriously R1's prescription without a shared interest and identity. R1 concludes therefore, by self-categorising as 'dude' (20) (a reference for 'man' in North American youth subcultures) and also as makeup user. In aligning himself with VC and his activity suggests R1 is a fellow 'metrosexual'. As Antaki and

Widdicombe (1998, p. 5) note, identity categories are rarely ‘named out aloud’. Instead ‘metrosexual’ is made relevant through indexing and occasioning. In other words, since R1 is a participant in the activity of discussing makeup use he may be indexed as ‘metrosexual’ and occasioned by the context of the event procedures e.g. how to apply makeup. Therefore, R1’s category, predicate and task (Hester & Eglin, 1997) i.e. ‘metrosexual’ men applying makeup for a ‘more chiseled look’, presents as advice worked up for VC’s benefit.

R1’s method of making cosmetics work for a ‘masculine look’ was quite unique in my dataset. The majority of the respondents were in favour of more modest uses. The following two responses demonstrate more conservative ways of rendering makeup use masculine.

#### Respondent 2

- 21 you should try mineral makeup! its good and u just never! NEVER  
22 can tell that you wearing makeup... its great for skin too! i  
23 recommend mineral power or if you like the good stuff try bare  
24 minerals. i stared with mineral power by maybelline and as i got  
25 better and more experienced i switched to bare minerals ohh its  
26 less time consuing too! in any case, you did great! a+

Unlike R1, R2’s response is a less restrained critique and this is noticeable from the outset with ‘you should try’ (23) rather than ‘I think that maybe’ (14). R2’s prescription is to use ‘mineral makeup’ supported by a list of reasons to strengthen the promotion of these products (Jefferson, 1991); it is discrete: ‘u just never! NEVER can tell that you wearing makeup’ (l21-22), ‘its great for skin’ (22) and ‘its

less time consuming' (25-26). It's evident from R2's list that these reasons have unequal importance. Healthy skin and application time are secondary benefits signaled by the addition of 'too' and an exclamation mark immediately after stating them. What is of primary importance for R2 is that wearing makeup is discrete, emphasized by capitalization 'NEVER' and the use of the repeated extreme-case formulation 'never! NEVER'. As I noted in my analysis of VC's text, extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) strengthen accounts, especially in adversarial situations. R2's use of 'never! NEVER' implies 'trouble' for 'men' who wear makeup, given the context of the video is a man applying makeup.

As R2's response provides advice - a cosmetic product that goes unnoticed - it could be argued that R2 is possibly a non-member who understands the issues for 'men' using makeup e.g. a wife whose husband was ridiculed by others when discovered wearing cosmetics. However, R2's response is presented from a personal perspective 'I recommend' (22-23), 'I stared with' (24), 'as I got better' and 'I switched to' (24-25) (Goffman, 1981), further grounded in the way that R2 presents naivety or inexperience 'as I got better' from starting with 'mineral powder' to switching to 'bare minerals', implies R2 has a shared experience similar to VC's. That is; learning to use makeup. This shared experience, occasioned also by discussing cosmetic use, indexes this response as a potential fellow category member, either specifically 'metrosexual' or more generally 'men who use makeup'. The significance of R2's response is that it seems to demonstrate in-group support and understanding emphasised with a positive sign-off and mark for VC's makeup tutorial 'in any case, you did great! a+' (26).

Unlike R2's response where the respondent's identity is not 'named out aloud' (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998), the following respondent immediately



demonstrates shared experience and identity by invoking the informal term for the category man - 'guy' and 'like me' - in the context of 'its nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup' (27).

### Respondent 3

27 its nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup. I wear mine  
28 because I have a mild form of rosacea<sup>7</sup>. So along with the help of  
29 tanning, I use liquid an foundation and pressed bronzer power and  
30 concealer to make my face look clear. People dont even realize I  
31 wear it.

Given VC's self-identification as a 'metrosexual', R3's shared identity as a makeup user ('its nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup') suggests this respondent also aligns with a 'metrosexual' identity. What R3's response also implies, is that men wearing makeup is uncommon and hence a non-normative activity for men, since, at least for R3, this is not a frequent occurrence. R3's orientation to gender: 'another guy like me', and non-normativity: 'makeup user' suggests that R3 and VC are members of a marginalized or newly formed, perhaps even a heroic, minority identity category. As seen with the previous responses, this suggests that there could be 'trouble' for members of this category in their non-conventional category-bound activities. R4 makes this explicit with his final statement: 'People dont even realize i wear it' (30-31). The significance of dissimulation is again underlined – makeup that is noticeable may draw gendered disapproval. Inoculation against potential charges of gender non-conformity is also

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<sup>7</sup> Rosacea is a chronic condition characterised by facial erythema (redness).

produced via the invocation of a medical rationale explaining R3's cosmetic use: 'I wear mine because I have a mild form of rosacea' (27-28). In other words, his makeup regime can be treated as serving a pragmatic, protective function rather than for superficial beautification purposes. This is further underlined in R3's choice of makeup: 'liquid tan foundation', 'bronzer powder' and 'concealer', along with 'the help of tanning' (29-30), all of which are both coverage and beautification products rather than perhaps lipstick, eyeliner, mascara, rouge and son on, which are for beautification only.

In responses 2 and 3 we saw that our 'metrosexuals' reported using makeup more discretely in order to avoid having to provide an account of their non-normative activity. In the next three responses presented, the 'metrosexuals' do not resort to notions of discretion around cosmetic use; nonetheless, they still make efforts to reframe their practices to inoculate themselves against potential charges of gender non-conformity.

## **Inoculation discourse**

Respondent 4

32 hey bro good shit im right there wit ya ... everymorning ...my

33 girlfriend loves having a guy who can look flawles :)

VC

34 Niceeee! aha

35 Girls love it\_ actually x]

R4's street vernacular greeting 'hey bro' (short for 'hey brother'), like previous

responses, immediately aligns R4 and VC as having a shared male identity, one which is centred on makeup use ‘im right there wit ya ... everymorning’ (32). R4’s invocation of time and activity references him as ‘metrosexual’ since, as we saw with VC’s text, one of the specified ‘metrosexual’ category features was men’s daily use of makeup. What’s interesting is that R4 chose to use street vernacular rather than other informal styles (e.g. see R1, R2 and R3’s). In choosing this style of response, R4 is able to present, not only himself, but also other male makeup uses as ‘cool’. Presenting men who use cosmetics as ‘cool’ implies that others may not agree, and spells the same potential gender ‘trouble’ as noted in previous extracts. R4’s second tactic for dealing with ‘trouble’ is by underlining a heterosexual benefit: ‘my girlfriend loves having a guy who can look flawless :)’ (32-33). The reference to heterosexuality serves to dismiss any potential accusations of homosexuality and resultant recategorization (Speer, 2005; Schegloff, 2007). Like VC’s introductory text, this indicates that makeup use for men is often viewed as a category-feature of ‘gay men’. What’s also interesting is that R4 further strengthens his account by making relevant his girlfriend’s opinion. The use of this tactic allows some accountability for his actions to be deflected onto her, to the extent that she ‘loves’ the ‘flawlessness’ provided by his makeup use.

What is also interesting is that VC replied to R4’s response. In my dataset VC was the only poster frequently recategorized as ‘gay’, and he made several attempts to reject this positioning. In his response here: ‘Niceeee! Aha Girls love it\_ actually x]’ (1.37-9), VC recycles R5’s claim around women finding men who wear makeup attractive, thereby reiterating his own heterosexual status. In the next response, another poster uses quite a different tactic to reframe makeup use:

## Respondent 5

36 You know what....speaking as a straight guy, i think that make up  
37 is way over rated as being marketed towards girls only. Its good  
38 for guys to be well groomed. It shows that they care about their  
39 body and they respect themselves and how they present themselves  
40 towards today's very judging society. Employers appreciate it  
41 when their employees are presentable. Having eyebrows nicely  
42 groomed, hair styled daily is good. And there is absolutely nothing  
43 wrong with a guy wearing makeup if he wants to.

R5's opening 'You know what' serves as a pre-announcement (Schegloff, 1998) for some statement to come. Yet before a statement is delivered, R5 immediately establishes his gender ('guy') and sexual orientation ('straight') (36). The category 'guys' belongs to a collection of categories that includes 'men', 'guys', 'lads' etc, which stand in opposition to the collection of categories, partitioned on sex, such 'girls' and 'women' and so on (Sacks, 1995). 'Straight' on the other hand is another term for 'heterosexual' as part of a collection of categories for sexual preference. In making his credentials immediately relevant, R5 implies that the forthcoming statement may potentially be controversial, in that others may think it has originated from a non-heterosexual 'guy'.

From a personalized perspective - 'I think', implying others may not agree - R5's claim is that 'make up is way over rated as being marketed towards girls only' (36-7). Drawing on the extreme-case formulation 'only' to support his assertion about the marketing of cosmetics nicely ties the activity of makeup as a normative feature of the category 'girls'. The implication in R5's statement is that this 'female

only' sex-based category feature 'should' also be feature of the category 'males'. However, in doing so, R5 is advocating that 'guys' participate in a non-normative category-bound activity. Since the implied downside to this is potentially having one's sexuality questioned (or recategorized: see Speer, 2005; Schegloff, 2007; Sacks, 1995), R5 is obliged to provide an account for why he seems to advocate this.

R5's account centers on what 'today's very judging society' (40) expects of men. That is, 'to be well groomed' which 'shows that they care about their body and they respect themselves' (38-39). Such an account summons discourses of choice, individuality and self-respect (see Gill et al.'s, 2005 interview research on these as category predicates of masculinity), which are further conveyed in the culminating statement 'if he wants to' (43). For those men who choose to wear makeup and groom - 'eyebrows nicely groomed, hair styled daily' - dividends are realizable in the workspace: 'Employers appreciate it when their employees are presentable', which is presented as 'fact'. Conversely, what R5's account also implies, therefore, is that those men who choose not to 'groom' may be negatively judged by society and less appreciated by employers. In doing so R5's account also serves as defense against, and warning to, his potential adversaries.

What's also noticeable about R5's account is that parameters of 'metrosexuality' can be extended to encompass other presentation practices: 'eyebrows nicely groomed, hair styled daily'. The implication of this, and potentially for any critics, is that many men who groom are 'metrosexual' without necessarily realizing it. The strategy of encompassing a greater number of and variety of men in the category 'metrosexual' is also undertaken in the following response.

Respondent 6

- 44 nice one !! i also use concealer and foundation, also like to contour. many  
45 straight men in Sydney Australia wears make up because we got harsh sun  
46 and windy winter down here. Even some NRL players I know wear  
47 makeup when they go out.

Although R6's response opens with an emphasised compliment 'nice one !!' before self-identifying as a makeup user ' i also use concealer and foundation', what's interesting is that, like R1, makeup is applied to enhance the 'masculine look' by contouring: 'also like to contour' (44). As with previous responses, R6's heterosexuality is made explicit. This is, achieved by self-ascribing 'we' as a co member of the category 'straight men'. As seen with other responses, naming one's heterosexual credentials serves to inoculate against potential charges of 'homosexuality'. In doing so, R6, like VC, R4 and R5, points to a social expectation, which presumes that men who wear cosmetics (other than for theatrical reasons) are 'gay'. Given the implication of this social norm, self-categorising as 'straight' doesn't mean one won't have to provide an account for non-conformity. R6's account centers on presenting men's makeup use as a 'need' in order to combat the impact of 'harsh sun and windy winter' (45-46). Like other responses (e.g. R3), R6's cosmetic use serves a pragmatic, protective function rather than for beautification. This formulation works to deflect some accountability for makeup use in the sense that 'men in Sydney Australia' at least, may 'need to' wear makeup rather than 'choosing to'. R6 further inoculates himself against being recategorized as 'gay' by stating as fact 'I know' that 'some' (46) NRL (National Rugby League) players wear makeup.

In doing so, R6 nicely ties makeup use as a conventional masculine activity.

In the following response, accountability is achieved not by association with a masculine sport or the 'harsh' environment, but in relation to notions of self-respect presented in relation to conventional men's disinterest in self-presentation.

Respondent 7

48 same here, 17 metro since 14, I basically do make up everyday to  
49 school, and not just 10 mins bud, I spend like 30 mins in front of the  
50 mirror, and 2 hours in the bathroom. some guys are just plain stupid.  
51 men=smelly, ugly, hairy? fuck that shit.

R7's response 'same here' acknowledges facing a similar situation to a response posted by another self-ascribed teenage 'metrosexual', who comments on how his best friend calls him 'gay' because he spends 10 minutes a day in front of the mirror applying cosmetics. It is clear from R7's initial response that he shares the same membership experience of being categorised as 'gay' instead of 'metrosexual' for doing 'make up everyday to school' (48-49). What is different and interesting about R7's response is that way in which he does makeup and grooming to position himself against another category of men: 'men=smelly, ugly, hairy?' (51). R7's three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) of category-predicates for these men, sets up a contrast pair of categories (Smith 1978): 'men who groom/men who don't groom.' In doing so R7 is able to critique this category of men 'jus plain stupid' and 'fuck that shit', but also masculinise 'metrosexual' cosmetics use and grooming in general, by implying that men who don't participate lack self-respect and are outmoded.

## Concluding Remarks

This study used a discursive psychological approach, incorporating aspects of membership categorization analysis, to engage with men's own accounts for their use of cosmetics. I provided seven extracts to examine how explicitly self-identified and implicitly referenced 'metrosexuals' reframed their non-normative activity in this respect. Some of these posts centred on reframing men's cosmetic use for health, hygiene and repair work (e.g. to cover skin defects) rather than for beautification concerns. Like the previous two studies, posters reproduced notions of heterosexual prowess and self-respect, as well as protection against hostile environments to account for their non-typical gender activities and practices. What was particularly interesting in this study was the two responses (R1, R6) that presented cosmetics in terms of rendering men more masculine by emphasising the contours of the face, particularly the nose, cheekbones and the chin. However, such non-typical masculine practices, if visible, run the risk of being held accountable.

It was also evident that most accounts centered on discretion in light of the potential for users to be recategorized (Speer, 2005) as 'gay' rather than 'metrosexual'. What was clear from these accounts is that makeup use by 'straight' men is still regarded as non-normative since, as the respondents suggest, it is conventionally either associated with 'girls' or 'gay men'. As Sacks (1974, 1992) and Schegloff (2007) have pointed out, those who are seen to be non-normative are often declared 'phony' or 'defective', respectively.

The analysis shows 'metrosexuality' demonstrates how identity categories regulate practices and the engender difficulties for those who appear to challenge conventional gendered binaries. Such difficulties indicate that it is still too early to



state that contemporary hetero-masculinities are being superseded or are in crisis (see MacInnes, 2001). Indeed, like the previous two studies the findings suggest that conventional masculinities are not in decline, but are merely being reworked and repackaged in a more image-conscious consumer-oriented society. However, I am cautious about making generalisations about this since the scope of these studies is restricted to English-speaking Western computer-mediated communication forms. Therefore, further work is required in non-Western and non-English speaking contexts. Further work is also required if we are to understand the significance of ‘metrosexuality’ for men, masculinities and sexualities. For example, as yet we know little about how other ‘metrosexual’ practices (e.g., ‘manscaping’<sup>8</sup>) are constructed and negotiated in online and offline contexts. We also know little of how self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ negotiate their identities in face-to-face contexts – beyond the scope of this thesis. It would also be interesting to study other contemporary masculine categories such as ‘ubersexual’ or ‘Eurosexual’ (see Salzmam et al., 2005), and these would help to further extend our understanding of the meaning and breadth of contemporary men, masculinities and sexualities. There is also scope to extend ‘metrosexual’ analyses to women. In 2010 Simpson and Hagood coined the term ‘Wo-Metrosexuality’ to account for the increasing number of women ‘adopting or aspiring to some degree to the hedonistic metropolitan lifestyle’ (Hagood, 2010, p.1). However, within the scope of this thesis, I can examine how modes of defense are deployed to reframe these non-typical masculine activities in the context of marketing facial cosmetics. It is this I now turn to study in the following chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Manscaping’ refers to men removing in full, or in part, body hair from regions such as the eyebrows, eyelashes, armpits, pubic region, legs, abdomen, chest and back.

## **6. Study 4**

### **‘We want to look our best without appearing flamboyant’: Stake management in men’s online cosmetics testimonials**

As noted throughout this thesis, the Internet has opened up new avenues for identity expression. In this study I examine the presentation of masculinities in a leading producer of men’s cosmetics advertising testimonials, given this mode of advertising is relatively new. What I aim to show by deploying discursive psychology and membership categorization analysis, is that when men write facial cosmetics testimonials they still justify the use of these non-typical masculine products even in the absence of others responses. The analysis highlights the continued difficulty men report in using typically feminized products, frequently accounting for their cosmetic use as a ‘corrective’ measure rather than for beautification.

### **The Body As A medium Of Culture**

The body is a medium of culture, both as ‘made’ by the daily rituals through which it is subjected (e.g. manners, diet, fitness regimes, eating times), and as a ‘text’ for representing culture on its surface through personal appearance (e.g. dress sense, hairstyle, body art, jewellery, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery) (Askegaard et al., 2002; Bordo, 1993; Grogan, 2010). The body as ‘text’ has taken on a more pronounced importance in late capitalist societies because it allows for the presentation and consumption of different identities (Stern & Russell, 2004). The fascination with ‘window dressing’ has been fueled and placed center-stage by manufacturers

searching for new markets and by the visual media's attempts to attract new audiences (Coupland, 2007). The various discourses of self-presentation circulated in the visual media encourage people to adopt practices in order to correct flaws in their appearance (e.g. skin tone and pimples) and to combat visible signs of ageing (e.g. grey hair, sagging skin and wrinkles) (Clarke & Griffin, 2008).

People are encouraged to engage with the body as a 'project' for developing the 'ideal look' (D'Alessandro & Chitty, 2011); one that is often achieved only with airbrushing (e.g. the actress Keira Knightly as featured in promotional images for the 2011 movie *Arthur*) (Borland, Telegraph, April 2, 2008). The accompanying message with the body as a 'project' is that everybody has room for self-improvement (Grogan, 2010). The ideal 'look' helps to create a world in which people are made to feel uncertain about their appearance, where there is a constant need to monitor for imperfections. Maintenance work is continually promoted in advertisements as an essential aspect of contemporary life where flaws are presented as developing quickly through diet, lifestyle, the environment and ageing.

The face is one of the central 'texts' of the body since it holds a key place in social interaction. The face is the most visible and often the most important surface of the body - a space with key zones: eyes, cheeks, lips, skin, etc. - important for both sexual attraction and social interaction (Clarke & Griffin, 2008). Various discourses of self-presentation emphasize and promote the benefits of a more attractive and marketable face (e.g. employment success, social popularity, sexual attention). Such discourses present the ideal face as young, healthy and beautiful (Coupland, 2007). The more attractive people believe they are, the more socially acceptable they believe they are - 'look good, feel good' (D'Alessandro & Chitty, 2011; Grogan, 2010). Of course the surface of the face is not a fixed space; it can be modified with the use of

cosmetics and skincare products.

Men's use of facial cosmetic use is considered one of the more extreme aspects of 'metrosexuality' (Harrison, 2008). Market research organization Mintel (2011) suggest men are currently taking more care of their appearance in an effort to increase their chances of success in their search for work, or in attempts to get ahead in their present position. L'Oreal UK (2010 p. 4), on the other hand, claim men are '...turning to cosmetics as a means of overcoming the ageing effects of the recession.' Despite the reasons, it is without doubt that 'the public gaze has turned on men, and men's gaze has turned toward the mirror' (Coupland, 2007 p. 42).

Although sales of men's cosmetics are growing at twice the rate of women's, there is still seems to be a problem for men because self-beautification is conventionally associated with women and femininity (Clarkson, 2005; Edwards, 2003; Kacen, 2000; Souiden & Diagne, 2009; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). Indeed, Edwards (2003 p. 141-142) argues that men and cosmetic self-presentation are still considered 'antithetical if not an outright oxymoron'. Men who use cosmetics must simultaneously disavow any 'inappropriate' interest in their own appearance in order to maintain 'manliness', or risk being caste as vain, narcissistic, effeminate or gay.

Given these apparent difficulties, this investigation looks at how the more successful cosmetics manufacturers such as Jean Paul Gaultier, KenMen and 4VOO are marketing their products to men. Exploring Examining visual and print media sources and advertising avenues, the majority of men's cosmetic products were advertised online. These were advertised and packaged in black, silver, grey and white and associated with conventional masculine indices concerning sex, evolution and nature. For example:

Men's grooming and makeup has its origins in evolution. Mother Nature chose to endow the male species with more color and splendor. The more a male stood out from his competition, the greater his chance of attracting a mate ([www.4voo.com/education/ed\\_history.htm](http://www.4voo.com/education/ed_history.htm)).

What was interesting and novel was that some manufacturers (especially 4VOO) were using male customers' testimonials as a method of advertising. The testimonial is an advertising message, which is believed to reflect the opinions, experiences or beliefs of the endorser. People's ability to make their thoughts, reactions, and opinions known to others via feedback mechanisms - e-mails, weblogs, chatrooms, bulletin boards, forums, comments, video and testimonials is one of the interesting capabilities of the modern Internet. Such feedback facilities are word-of-mouth forms of advertising (Dellarocas, 2003) which, unlike company-dependent adverts (e.g. TV and magazine adverts) in which the message is controlled, present as more authentic, sincere and believable (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2005). Since the use of testimonials for advertising are governed by strict principles (e.g. unrehearsed and presented in the consumers own words), regulated by organizations such as the UK Advertising Standards Agency and the US Federal Trade Commission and enforceable by law, their validity is enhanced.

The use of testimonials in various online markets (e.g. holidays, recruitment and, in particular, eBay sales) has proven an effective method of marketing (see: Kotler & Keller, 2005; Mittelstadt et al., 2000; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007). In light of this, it was surprising that there was an absence of discursive research on this online medium. Most current discursive research has focused on other online formats such as dating message boards (Epstein, 2007), forums (Horne & Wiggins, 2009) and

chatrooms (Vallis, 2001). In contrast to other online formats electronic dialogue does not feature; i.e. readers are unable to respond directly. Given the uniqueness of this medium, and that men were publicly describing and promoting a culturally ‘delicate’ topic (see Silverman, 2003), it was wondered: in what ways are men managing interest in the use of cosmetics?

## **Data**

The dataset for this study is drawn from a recognised quality men’s cosmetic line 4VOO *Distinct Man*. Launched in 2003 as ‘It’s a Metrosexual Thing’ (4VOO, 2003), the Canadian-based company with International outlets in the Americas, Europe, Australasia and South East Asia, provides luxury cosmetic and skincare products specifically formulated for men. Considered one of the world’s leading brands providing men with their own cosmetics 4VOO advertises its growing popularity by the glittering array of A-list celebrity endorsements, which include Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Dustin Hoffman, Michael Douglas and Simon Cowell.

Testimonials by Stefano Gabbana, Rick Campanelli, Julian Gill, Jai Rodriguez and many more also feature on 4VOO’s website. Sitting side-by-side with these are non-celebrity testimonials. Product users are provided with a comment facility at the base of the online testimonial page to write their views. Customer comments are moderated before going ‘live’. In all, sixty-five testimonials are displayed, and this is unique compared to 4VOO’s main rivals such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Clinique, Ken Men, Makeup Artist Cosmetics and Menaji, in which only half-a-dozen feature in each. Given the wealth of available data and the apparent popularity of 4VOO’s products this study focuses on non-celebrity testimonials as

cosmetics use is less excusable as part of the celebrity status (e.g. the TV star Russell Brand is able to openly use eyeliner).

## **Method**

Testimonials, like other forms of computer-mediated communication, can be treated as ‘real talk’ because people can and do the same things as in off-line communications such as identities, descriptions, accounts and so on, by relying on the same references to space, embodiment, time and shared experiences (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003; Coyle & MacWhannell, 2002). Therefore, when people do electronic talk about the things they do and encounter on a daily basis, they must be able to select adequate descriptions and references about them from an infinite number of possibilities. However, the selection, construction and management of these are not by chance; they are designed specifically to construct and manage identities and social relations, make particular inferences, and promote specific interests (Silverman, 1998 p. 132). This design of ‘talk’ is the focus of Discursive Psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

One interest men have, in a culture where men’s concern with self-presentation practices is considered antithetical (Clarkson, 2005; Edwards, 2003; Kacen, 2000; Souiden & Diagne, 2009; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), is maintaining ‘manliness’ whilst grooming. Membership Categorization Analysis (Sacks, 1992) shows that particular identity categories are associated with particular actions (category-bound activities) and characteristics (category predicates). If a person contravenes those culturally held associations they may be seen as “an exception’, ‘different’, or ‘defective’ category member (Schegloff, 2007 p. 469) and

recategorized (Speer, 2005). That is, men who use cosmetics (e.g. 'metrosexuals') are often considered either effeminate or 'gay' (Edwards, 2003).

When men account for non-normative activity, their talk in these testimonials must be selected, constructed and managed for 'stake' (i.e. their personal interest). As Edwards and Potter (1992, p.158) point out:

Anyone who produces a version of something that happened in the past, or who develops a stretch of talk that places blame...does so at the risk of having their claims discounted...participants should be thought of as caught in a dilemma of stake or interest: how to produce accounts which attend to interests without being undermined as interested.

Such a dilemma can be managed in a various ways. In order to be able to see which aspects are deployed in the data this paper draws on the methodological tools available from Discursive Psychology (DP) (Edwards & Potter, 1992) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1992). The relevant aspects of each of these methods are discussed during the course of our step-by-step analysis in which each segment of text is analysed to see how it fits together and for what the 'poster' was achieving at each and every stage.

Although, following DP and MCA methodological principles, apriori assumptions and claims cannot be made as that would risk an analyst-based interpretation. Instead we only focus on what the men have made relevant themselves in their testimonial talk before this is contextualised. That is, in order to be able to fully understand any text, one must also be able to understand something about the



culture in which it was produced (Pomerantz, 1984). Therefore, it should be born in mind that men's consumption and use of cosmetics products is a culturally delicate topic - it is still considered transgressive in the context of prevailing notions of masculinity (Edwards, 2003 p. 141-142).

Unsurprisingly, given the difficulties with men using cosmetics, only two of the sixty-five testimonials made reference to cosmetic use. The majority either alluded to them either as 4VOO products or skin care products, even though many of the products the men use are listed under 4VOO's men's cosmetics section. Since this study is interested in men's cosmetic use the sixteen testimonials from both celebrity and non-celebrity users who explicitly named the cosmetic products they use were initially selected. As celebrity and high-profile users are able to reframe their cosmetics use as a requirement of their work, much like the TV personality Russell Brand, I decided to focus on the remaining six non-celebrities and lower-profile user testimonials.

## **Analysis**

Given this cultural context data is analysed to see how men managed their accounts of using a non-typical gendered product. A surface reading suggested that men's accounts were simple justifications for non-normative activity. What was more interesting was the way in which the men simultaneously did cosmetic talk whilst also maintaining an appropriate level of 'manliness'. How was this achieved in the data?:

## User Responses: ‘Need To Use’

*Alec Wesley: with the UN collation out in (the hottest part of) Africa*

- 1 “I am simply in love with 4VOO products, I spend the past six
- 2 months in the arid 130 degree daily temperatures which did
- 3 nothing but wreak havoc on my skin. I looked aged, haggard, and
- 4 discontented. 4VOO facial balancing cleanser, maximum renewal
- 5 moisturizer, and lipid lip serum have been the turning point of my
- 6 life. I just got back from holiday and 4VOO completely made it
- 7 possible because it made me back into myself again. Thank You
- 8 So Much, now back to the military life...”

The first thing to notice is that Alec’s testimonial is preceded by a short biography. Sacks (1992 p. 4) noted that one of the procedural rules of conversation was that who speaks first tends to choose the tone and context for any subsequent talk. Although no further conversation is explicitly possible, as no electronic response feature is available, this procedural rule still holds as Alec’s biography sets up how the rest of the text should be read and understood by the audience. Therefore, the work, place and environment features in Alec’s biography ‘with the UN collation out in (the hottest part of) Africa’ set the tone and context of this testimonial to be read in a particular way. Of course the selection of these is not haphazard; they are designed for some purpose (Silverman, 1998 p. 132). Alec’s choice of extremes (‘hottest’) may indicate the possibility of readers’ undermining his claims (Edwards & Potter, 1992 p. 158). That is, if a speaker anticipates others questioning their action(s) then a worked up account may be provided beforehand. Silverman and Peräkylä (2008) noted that such discursive work can occur when speakers are about to introduce a

‘delicate’ topic.

There is not an explicit account of the ‘delicacy’ in the first part of the initial sentence; instead, Alec self-identifies (‘I am’) as a member of a category of people who are ‘in love with 4VOO products’ (1). What is interesting is that Alec use of ‘simply’ (1). ‘Simply’ acts as an upgrade, which is able to invoke maximal properties. Upgrades (and downgrades) tend to be deployed in adversarial situations in order to reduce the basis for others to search for an account or undermine claims (Pomerantz, 1986 p. 219-220). Alec’s deployment of ‘simply’ between membership ‘I am” and the membership feature ‘in love with 4VOO products’ indicates to readers that interpretations should not be read outside of the context of this text. Although we don’t get an indication of those possible readings, Alec is signaling that being ‘in love with 4VOO products’ is a not a typical category-feature for men and indeed those from the military.

Given the potential delicacy of this activity Alec proceeds to qualify his use of cosmetics in terms of a ‘need to use’. This is achieved by a re-statement and further qualification of the harsh conditions that he works in ‘I spend the past six months in the arid 130 degree daily temperatures’ (2). The problem associated with this environment is to ‘wreak havoc on my skin’ (3). These skin issues are further qualified in a three-part list ‘I looked aged, haggard, and discontented’ (3-4). The deployment of three or more items on a list adds clarity and weight to any point being made (Jefferson, 1991). Therefore, Alec’s list serves to support and strengthen his implied ‘need to use’ account of his cosmetic use in the presence of potential discord or criticism.

As one would expect of an advertising testimonial, the products used are explicitly stated (see 4-5). What is interesting is that these products are outlined

noting that they ‘have been the turning point of my life. I just got back from holiday and 4VOO completely made it possible because it made me back into myself again’ (6-7). The transformative nature of the cosmetics ‘made me back into myself again’ supports and strengthens the extremism of his work and working environment, and further adds weight to the implication that he ‘needs to use’ cosmetics in order to be able to undertake ‘normal’ everyday activities such as going on ‘holiday’. A non-normative or extreme job and working environment perhaps requires a non-normative or extreme remedy in order to regain some level of ‘normality’.

The design, selection and stake issues (Silverman, 1998, p. 132) in the testimonial indicate that Alec is attempting to inoculate himself from charges of wearing cosmetics for reasons other than to remedy looking ‘aged, haggard, and discontented’ (3-4) - presumably beautification. Situating this text in a wider cultural context (Pomerantz, 1984) where cosmetics tends to be viewed a non-normative category-bound activity for men (Clarkson, 2005; Edwards, 2003; Kacen, 2000; Souiden & Diagne, 2009; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), Alec’s ‘stake inoculation’ (see: Edwards & Potter, 1992) presents as an attempt to protect him from charges of effeminacy or homosexuality (see author references for a discussion of the links between effeminacy, homosexuality and cosmetic use).

The use of extreme scenarios in stake inoculation was a discursive strategy that was also encountered in the following testimonial, albeit differently:

*Don, San Francisco, CA*

9 I just bought the confidence corrector and I love it!!!! It sure helps  
10 out for those crazy party weekends, it covers my dark circles and

11 looks like I just had a good night sleep!!! I bought correctors at  
12 various department stores and they look so caked on my skin, this  
13 one makes your skin look very natural. I will now only buy from  
14 4VOO! THANKS A MILLION!

This testimonial is preceded by a much shorter biography than Alec's, containing only the respondent's first name, city and state of residence. We can only speculate as to the reason why this person wishes to remain relatively anonymous to readers. However, revealing only a basic level of personal detail in ones biography was a common feature of men testimonials.

Don's testimonial opens by stating that he is in love with the cosmetic product he has just purchased. The use of 'just bought' in combination with 'I love it!!!' (9) is interesting because it not only presents the product as an instant hit with the purchaser, but also marks Don's time of use of the product(s). The marking of time was an important feature we encountered in the majority men's testimonials. Alec's testimonial marked time of use as a break from military life 'I just got back from holiday and 4VOO completely made it possible...now back to the military life..,' (6-8). In Don's testimonial, time is marked as not having used this product for long 'just bought'; also, the product for specific occasions 'It sure helps out for those crazy party weekends...' (9-10). These references to time imply that cosmetic use is not daily; in other words, it is distinct from many women's daily cosmetics use (see: Carey et al., 2010; Dellinger & Williams, 1997). This distinguishing feature ties nicely with the activity of 'partying', presented as extreme ('crazy': 9-10) - his (and also Alec's) choice in using cosmetics is due to exceptional circumstances. Alec uses the products to combat the problematic consequences associated with such activity

(‘my dark circles; looking like he hasn’t had ‘a good night sleep!!!’: 10-11). The transformative aspect and the remedy this product provides supports and strengthens the implication that Don ‘needs to use’ cosmetics for this type of extreme activity. As we saw in the previous testimonial, such a discursive move inoculates against charges of wearing cosmetics for other reasons.

Don also states, like many other advertising testimonials, that other products previously tried are inferior: ‘I bought correctors at various department stores and they look so caked on my skin’ (11-12). What is interesting is Don’s choice to promote 4VOO products as ‘this one makes your skin look very natural’ (13). That is, this one doesn’t make one look made up. The message this sends to other readers is that these men’s cosmetics can be used discreetly and so distinguishable from the colour of some women’s cosmetic brands (see: Carey et al., 2010; Dellinger & Williams, 1997).

The importance of being discreet about ones cosmetics use was also an important factor in the following testimonial:

*Michael, New York, NY*

15 I just started using silk enriched shine reduction powder. It is great.  
16 No shine, brightens my skin antioxidants. and sunscreen, and you  
17 cannot even notice it, who could ask for more. I cannot wait to try  
18 4VOO’s other products.

Like the previous testimonials time of use is marked ‘I just started using’ (15) and presented as a discovery; the benefits of which are ‘No shine, brightens my skin

antioxidants. and sunscreen' (16). As I mentioned above, the use of listing adds clarity and weight to the point being made (Jefferson, 1991). What's interesting to note is that the items on Michael's list health-related and they are presented as pragmatic - a healthy image 'No shine, brightens my skin', a health provider 'antioxidants' and health protection 'sunscreen'. This discursive move references and suggests that his use of cosmetics is for pragmatic reasons serves as a way to inoculate Michael from charges using these products for beautification. Like Don's testimonial, Michael also explicitly supports this position by stating that having a discreet look is an important benefit 'and you cannot even notice it, who could ask for more' (16-17). Of course being discreet means that unsolicited comments are avoided. However, as we will see in the next testimonial, some level of recognition is also desirable.

*Jason, USA*

19 Fantastic products! I have been using the 4VOO line for the last  
20 couple months and there is a dramatic change in my skin. My skin is  
21 now clear, smooth, and has a even tone. My family, co-workers, and  
22 friends are all complementing my healthy skin. Theses products are  
23 the best! Every man should keep their corrector, shine reduction  
24 powder, lip serum, and lip protector by their side for that all day  
25 fresh well kept looked. 4VOO 4LIFE

Jason's cosmetics use 'corrector, shine reduction powder, lip serum, and lip protector' (23-24) is longer than we have seen in previous testimonials 'for the last couple months' (19-20). Yet Jason is able to inoculate against charges of having a

regular beautification regime by implying that his use of these products is for remedying skin complaints ‘there is a dramatic change in my skin’ (20). In other words, Jason is discursively constructing an identity in contrast to others who may use cosmetics for beautification, in order to reduce the risk of category reassignment (see Dickerson, 2000). This position is further supported by providing a three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) of skin benefits ‘clear, smooth, and has a even tone’ (21). What’s also noticeable is that these skin ‘changes’ give social recognition and corroborated by the three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) ‘My family, co-workers, and friends are all complementing my healthy skin’ (21-22). The social acceptability of Jason’s cosmetic use works two ways. Firstly, it improves social standing in that healthy facial skin is associated with beauty and sexual attraction, and social success and popularity (Coupland, 2007). Secondly, the positive recognition ‘complementing’ by ‘family, co-workers, and friends’ suggests that cosmetics use by men for health-related reasons is socially acceptable and so gives other men permission to use these products.

What is also novel in Jason’s testimonial is the suggestion that men should have a daily routine and carry their cosmetics around with them ‘Every man should keep their corrector, shine reduction powder, lip serum, and lip protector by their side for that all day fresh well kept looked (23-25). This suggestion seemed a little dangerous since the carrying of a cosmetics bag around is associated with women and femininity (Dellinger & Williams, 1997). Even more so given that Jason invokes the extreme-case formulation ‘Every man’. The deployment of such maximal properties tends to reduce the basis for others to search for an account when others may propose that this behaviour is wrong (Pomerantz, 1986). Yet here it seemed to suggest an account should be provided given the potential charges of effeminacy and



homosexuality with such an action (Edwards, 2003). Jason does account for using the upgrade ‘Every man’ by restating the potential benefits of positive social recognition ‘for that all day fresh well kept looked’.

The stake management (Edwards & Potter, 1992) of a ‘delicate’ topic (Silverman & Peräkylä, 2008) we have shown in Jason’s testimonial highlights the difficulties of participating and promoting a non-normative activity. As we noted in the methods section of the paper, particular membership categories are linked to particular actions (category-bound activities) and characteristics (category predicates) (Sacks, 1992). Contravention, or advocating others do the same, risks recategorisation (e.g. effeminate or gay) (Speer, 2005). In order to avoid this, members must reframe participation and promotion of a non-normative activity as a members’ activity or predicate and we can see Jason (and the other ‘posters’) achieving this by reframing cosmetics use for health reasons and social recognition. This was also a tact used in the following testimonial:

*Bob, Princeton, NJ*

26 I just started using 4VOO distinct man and I’m already in love with  
27 the product line! Since my early twenties, I’ve been absolutely  
28 unable to rid myself of three or four positively relentless blemishes  
29 on my forehead. While they were nothing major, they did leave me  
30 feeling unattractive and self-conscious. Every skin treatment I tried  
31 was a complete failure and all the dermatologists I talked to were  
32 less than helpful. I had tried several women’s cosmetics to try to  
33 conceal the blemishes - but all of them left me looking like I was  
34 wearing makeup. 4VOO is GREAT. I’ve been using the Confidence

35 Corrector and the Shine Reduction Powder and I feel like I've never  
36 looked better. The products are subtle, lightweight, and have great  
37 staying power! I also purchased the Lip Serum and the Lash & Brow  
38 Styling Glaze and I love what they do for my look. I don't think I've  
39 ever felt this confident about my appearance. THANK YOU 4VOO!

Opening with 'I just started using' and 'I'm already in love with' Bob's testimonial follows the same testimonial structure as the other posters. What's of interest for our analysis is how Bob frames his cosmetics use as a result of a medium to long-term 'Since my early twenties' (27) skin complaint 'three or four positively relentless blemishes on my forehead' (28-29). Like previous texts, Bob constructs his testimonial so that it is readable as a 'need to use cosmetics' and specifically 4VOO cosmetics. This is further bolstered by the use of two extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) 'Every skin treatment' (30) and 'all dermatologists' (31), which serve to minimise the risk of others searching for alternative explanations for his Bob's cosmetics use e.g. beautification.

What's also interesting is that Bob places this men's cosmetics line as superior to women's 'I had tried several women's cosmetics to try to conceal the blemishes - but all of them left me looking like I was wearing makeup' (33-34). Two things are evident in this sentence. Firstly, women's cosmetics are dismissible because they are visible, whereas men's cosmetics superior because they are discreet. It is worth also remembering that the discreet use of cosmetics was also an important issue in Don and Michael's testimonials. The emphasis on this issues ties in nicely with the second point made in the sentence, which is that cosmetics use is for 'concealing' (our emphasis). What this does is position men's cosmetics as

‘correctors’ and as such should be non-visible.

What I have shown in this testimonial, like the other testimonials, is that stake management (Edwards & Potter, 1992) is achieved by framing cosmetics as ‘a need to use’. The main differences between each testimonial are the reasons given by each poster, whether they be due to the environment, lifestyle, social status, the presentation of health and skin complaints. Although these texts promote cosmetics, they do so for pragmatic reasons. However this is not the case in the following and final testimonial:

### **User Response: ‘Want To Use’**

Donald Murrell, Augusta, GA

40 Dear Gentlemen:  
41 I understand a lid color is now available or on the horizon for the  
42 sophisticated man. I wanted a comment about this product for  
43 myself as well as for the legions of us who want to look our best  
44 without appearing flamboyant; just that little touch of color to  
45 elevate our natural look to supernatural. Thanks for your advances  
46 in men’s cosmetics.  
47 Yours truly, Donald Murrell

The first thing to notice is that this testimonial is written in the style of a letter addressed to the men ‘Dear Gentlemen’ (40) behind the 4VOO products and written from a personal perspective ‘for myself’ (42-43) and as the voice of other male cosmetics users ‘as well as for the legions of us’ (43) (see Goffman, 1979 for more

about shifts in footing). Presenting a text in this way achieves two things. Firstly, Donald's indirect self-identification and reference to male cosmetics users as 'sophisticated *men*' (42) (my emphasis) sets up a contrast pair (Smith, 1978) – male cosmetics users = sophisticated/male non cosmetics users = unsophisticated – in which non cosmetics users are downgraded. What this does is hold these men accountable for their disinterest in not wanting to 'look our best' (43). In addition, a second contrast pair is set up – majority/minority – in which non cosmetic users are presented as the minority 'the legions of us who want to look our best without appearing flamboyant' (43-44). Notice also that 'without appearing flamboyant' serves as a pre-emptive defense against potential charges of using cosmetics for reasons (presumably beautification) other than to look ones.

What's also interesting is that Donald advocates the use of a 'little touch of color' (44). Colour is the major distinguishing feature between women and men's cosmetics (see: L'Oreal UK, 2010; *New York Times*, September 1, 2010). Although such a move risks being castigated as 'effeminate' or 'gay' (Edwards, 2003), Donald avoids such charges by referencing the 'look' as natural. Although a 'touch of color' from cosmetics elevates the 'natural look to supernatural', 'supernatural' in this context is readable as an improved 'super' natural look rather than a beautified or other worldly look. In doing so Donald is able to promote these products whilst also keeping them masculine and distinct from women's cosmetics. By suggesting that male use of cosmetics is common 'the legions of us', but still maintaining a 'natural' look, although elevated to 'supernatural' was a novel and interesting management of stake in our data (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

## Concluding remarks

Men's cosmetics appear to be a growth industry (L'Oreal UK, 2010; *New York Times*, September 1, 2010) and many high-end cosmetics manufacturers (e.g. Jean Paul Gaultier) have recently produced men specific products. This study focused on arguably the premier cosmetics manufacturer for men – 4VOO. Even with the increasing popularity of these products, men's cosmetics use still remains 'antithetical' (Edwards, 2003) and a culturally 'delicate' topic (Silverman & Peräkylä, 2008). Given this cultural context a broadly discursive approach was used to analyse how men promoted and discussed their cosmetic use in online testimonials. Six testimonials by non-celebrity or high-profile users who would not be able to easily pass their cosmetics use off as part of the job description were presented. The study focused primarily on how these posters managed their stake in this activity (Edwards & Potter, 1992). That is, how they were able to 'inoculate' themselves from charges of 'effeminacy' or being 'gay' (Edwards, 2003). What was found was that stake was managed in two ways – either 'need to' or 'want to' use. As I showed, the majority of testimonials presented framed cosmetics use as 'need to use' centering on factors such as the environment, lifestyle and skin complaints. Where 'want to use' was invoked, the poster held non-cosmetic users accountable for not wanting to look their 'best' and in the minority.

Similar styles of stake inoculation also featured in the YouTube data in the previous chapter. Like these respondents, makeup use was seen as a corrective measure for skin complaints. Similarly, two studies provided justifications for 'want to' use. Although different in emphasis, the two separate responses are remarkably similar. In Chapter 5 the respondent suggested makeup use could enhance masculine features with contouring, whereas in this study the respondent suggests makeup use

can enhance masculinity by looking ones best. What is common to all these responses is that conventional masculine markers ‘corrective’, ‘technical’, ‘chiseled’, ‘self-respect’, ‘work’ and son on are drawn upon in accounting for non-typical gender activities and practice.

The analysis shows also the difficulties of stepping outside of conventional gender identity boundaries even in a supportive online environment facilitated by marketers and manufacturers. Although the current fascination with men’s cosmetics suggests gender identity boundary resistance and a potential growth market, it is still too early to say whether men’s cosmetic use will become more widespread or normative for men. As I showed in the analysis, most men still managed their use of cosmetic products as ‘need to’ rather than ‘want to’ and so for corrective measures rather than for beautification, typically associated with women and femininity. This distinction from women’s cosmetics and use of these products suggests that conventional hetero-masculinities founded on work, sexual attraction, success and pragmatism are still influential and readily available (Coupland, 2007). What this also indicates is that contemporary masculinities are potentially being modernized due to changes in work and lifestyle practices such corporate image and presenting self-respect.

Clearly, the data is restricted to 4VOO, English speaking Western computer-mediated testimonials. Therefore, further work is required in non-Western and non-English speaking contexts. Other research might focus on identity management in relation to other products and customers testimonials, including other online computer-mediated formats in marketing. Although ‘metrosexuality’ and its associated activities and products use have recently been examined in online men’s lifestyle magazines Chapter 3, online forums Chapter 4 and YouTube Chapter 5, it

may also prove interesting is to examine men's changing attitudes to products such as perfumes - products that were once marginalized, but have now gone mainstream (Intel Oxygen, 2011). Investigating resistance to, and changing boundaries of, gender identity categories affords academics, policymakers and marketers valuable insights into the difficulties of stepping outside non-typical gendered boundaries. I discuss the wider implications of these in the following chapter.

## 7. Discussion

The analysis across the four separate but interrelated studies I have presented in this thesis has been focused on how self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ do membership of this new masculine identity category in relation to other gender and sexual identities. It focused specifically on a number of points:

- 1) How do men self-identify with, disavow and negotiate metrosexuality?
- 2) How is ‘metrosexuality’ defined as a category and what are the essential characteristics and practices of membership?
- 3) How is ‘metrosexuality’ presented in reference to other gender and sexual identities?
- 4) To what extent does ‘metrosexuality’ challenge more conventional forms of masculinity or constitute a new masculine identity?

‘Metrosexual’ talk was examined in four online settings – men’s style magazine, commercial forum, video and advertising testimonials. This was undertaken from a membership categorisation and discursive psychological perspective in order to provide an empirically grounded description of an array of discursive practices drawn upon to do this identity. The analysis from the four studies demonstrated that these ‘metrosexuals’ defined their identity predominantly on image conscious practices and positioned their masculinities in relation to more conventional masculinities drawing upon traditional masculine markers either to justify their non-normative activities and behaviours or to discredit more conventional masculinities for not embracing modern masculine trends. This suggests there is still analytical mileage in the concept of



hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) as ideals presented in the media for some men to position themselves in relation to these. However, given that 'metrosexuals' seem to reject more dominant notions of masculinity and that membership characteristics and activities are still relatively fluid it also supports Wetherell and Edley's (1999) discursive critique questioning the point of a concept that no man actually embodies. Indeed, 'metrosexuality' seems to be more in line with Anderson's (2005, 2008) 'inclusive masculinities' in which men demonstrate rejection of more 'orthodox' notions of masculinities, such as those associated with movie characters such as Dominic Toretto and Del Spooner, in favour of masculinities that incorporate and/or tolerate more variance in gender and sexuality. But of course, caution is advised as the data demonstrate that displays of 'metrosexuality' are still bound up with more traditional notions of masculinity and how men 'should' or 'need' to behave.

This thesis also makes a number of significant contributions to broader domains of enquiry. Firstly, it adds a valuable contribution to the expanding body of literature across multiple disciplines, which focuses on how identities get done in Internet settings (Horne & Wiggins, 2009; Moursand, 1997; Vallis, 2001; Winzelburg, 1997), supporting the perspective that marginalised identities are more easily claimed online (Slouka, 1995; Wellman & Gulia, 1999) - users can exit difficult situations more easily than in face-to-face interaction and garner support from other members who may be geographically dispersed. Similarly, it provides scholars working in disciplines as diverse as marketing, health and gender with invaluable insights into how masculinity (and gender more broadly) and sexuality are operationalised on a moment-to-moment basis and the boundaries that govern men's

(and women's) participation in non-typical activities and behaviours, but also how these can be manipulated to manage and account for non-normativity.

Secondly, the findings of these studies highlight the continuities and changes in men's embodiment from the body as a tool for work, to an entity that can be moulded and decorated for personal ascetic (Coad, 2008) or as a result of body dissatisfaction (Grogan, 2008, p 30). What was also evident from a number of responses was that the presentation of the body was in part a contemporary requirement in order to secure employment in an ever increasingly competitive job market. What these findings also suggest is that men (and boys) contemporary fascination and dissatisfaction with body image cuts across ethnicity and socioeconomic boundaries, and also across age and provides some insight into issues such as why teacher's suggest boys increasingly have low self-esteem about their body image (BBC, March, 23 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-21864312>)

Lastly, this thesis also a makes significant contribution to the growing body of literature on, and advertises the benefits of, undertaking a micro-textual and in-situ empirical analysis of talk using ethnomethodological-based methodologies and especially membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1992) and discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992), which are deployable in online settings. Indeed, the usefulness of such methods is even more prevalent given people are reported to be spending more and more time in online settings.

In Chapter 1 I provided an overview of men's consumption of image enhancing products and practices both in the UK and abroad emphasising the growth in demand over the last few decades - estimated to reach approximately £1 billion by 2016 (L'Oréal, 2010; Mintel, 2012; Superdrug, 2010). Although marketers had met this demand with a plethora of male targeted items such as moisturisers and skin

revitalising products, I pointed out that what was novel about this trend was the emergence and growth of men's facial cosmetics by major international names such as Jean Paul Gaultier and 4VOO, along with Taxi Cosmetics by Superdrug offering a cheaper alternative available to all incomes. The significance of this development was that the final frontier of gender discrete activities was now being breached and that signaled a potential change in masculinities. Some such as Simpson (1994, 2002) who coined the term 'metrosexual' suggested this trend represented a 'new, narcissistic, media-saturated, self-conscious kind of masculinity' (Simpson, 2004). Yet what was clear from the various mediated definitions presented was that traditional notions of discrete gender activities and behaviours were being policed with transgressors risking being referred to as 'effeminate' and 'homosexual' – terms of abuse.

The policing of 'metrosexuality' evident in some media discourses, I showed may be a bi-product of dominant or 'hegemonic' notions of masculinities circulating in the media (e.g. Del Spooner in *iRobot* played by Will Smith). This perspective is supported by studies everyday applied settings (e.g. Gough, 2006, 2007; Gough and Edwards, 1998; Harrison, 2008; Seymour-Smith *et al.*, 2002; Simpson, 2005), which shows that the risk of recategorisation or having one's masculinity challenged leads some men to reframe their non-normative practices in more dominant or 'hegemonic' masculine ways such as for career progression, disinterest and sporting endeavour.

Given the obvious opportunity to examine 'metrosexuality' in this context it was surprising that academics had previously only engaged with 'metrosexuality' from sociological perspectives (Carniel, 2009; Coad, 2008; Miller; 2006, 2009) - Harrison (2008) being the only exception. This absence of a 'metrosexual' perspective provided the basis for this thesis. I then set out the main objective of the

thesis which was to examine how self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ achieve their identity in light of dominant notions of masculinities, focusing specifically on the resources deployed for this and for defending against unwanted charges, but also whether ‘metrosexuality’ does indeed constitute a new and emergent masculinity or whether it is masculinity reframed to account for the demands of the modern male.

In moving on to consider how such perspectives could be analysed I outlined in Chapter 2 the benefits using online texts of ‘metrosexual’ talk where researcher influence was absent in their construction. I indicated how DP and MCA are complimentary methods although they tend to focus on different aspects in talk. DP focuses on the particulars of how people report, describe, manage their stake, account for doing, or not doing things and so on (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 160), whereas MCA focuses on the how people orientate to category membership features such as predicates and activities, the policing of membership entitlement and transgressions, and recategorisation. Yet although as I have pointed out in the four separate but interrelated studies that much can be learned from DP and MCA analysis, I also indicated some of the limitations. A major critique of these micro-textual analyses is that by only identifying what emerges from the data means it’s not possible to pass comment on macro-issues such as the operation of power structures, ideology, persuasion and so on like CDA (Fairclough, 2001, p.229-266) and Foucauldian Analysis (Foucault, 1980). To do so would be stepping outside the data and returning to an analysis-led interpretation. Analysts working in these other methodological traditions argue that in doing so DP and MCA analysts miss an opportunity to help emancipate those disaffected by such social structures. However, although this is arguably a weakness their strength as analytical methods is that they allow the identification of people’s own perspectives. Such insights in turn can help understand

how social barriers operate at the micro-textual, which in turn can influence policy and contribute to furthering our understanding of how masculinities operate in other areas such as in relation to the body (see Grogan, 2008).

Having set out the benefits of examining online textual data and of using discursive tools, I proceeded to the four separate but interrelated published studies. Study one engaged with an article in the men's lifestyle magazine AskMen.com identifying how common-sense cultural knowledge pertaining to gender identities is invoked in the naming and development of new categories and predicates associated with particular groups. The analysis showed that 'metrosexuality' elicited both positive and negative responses and raised questions over the fixity of traditional gendered identities. Although the article provided an argument for 'metrosexuality' as a new and exciting heterosexual masculine identity, responses were mixed citing 'copycat' gay and women's identity pursuits. In response to these and other charges self-identifying 'metrosexuals' responses could be seen to be framed by recourse to classic masculine markers such as self-respect and heterosexual success.

Study two built on the analysis in the previous study by also showing that there is a lot at stake for self-ascribing metrosexuals (Edwards, 2006) as on the one hand metrosexuality was critiqued and rejected as non-masculine while on the other self-identifying metrosexuals invoked conventional masculinity signifiers in the process of their identity work. What was novel about this study were the discursive resources informing identity construction, which included the deployment of listing (Jefferson, 1991) as a strategy for orienting to 'metrosexuality', along with the use of irony and humour (see Benwell, 2004) providing inoculation against charges of effeminacy or vanity. Like study one, self-identifying 'metrosexuals' drew on classic masculine markers such as sexual prowess to account for their non-normative

behaviours and tastes, therefore again demonstrating that hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) remain culturally available and influential.

Study three on the other hand, engaged with men's own accounts for their use of cosmetics; considered at the more-extreme end of the 'metrosexual' activity spectrum (Harrison, 2008). Although some accounts were similar to the previous two studies accounting for cosmetic use for sexual prowess and self-respect, other accounts were more activity specific centering on reframing men's cosmetic use for health, hygiene and repair work as well as protection against hostile environments. Two accounts suggested men's facial cosmetics could be deployed to make one look more masculine by emphasising the contours of the face. Yet the main thread throughout all of these accounts was a defense against charges of using cosmetics for beautification concerns and the risk of being categorised as effeminate or gay. Similar processes and outcomes were also observed in study four which focused on how men promoted and discussed their cosmetic use in 4VOO online testimonials. The primary focus of this study was on how these posters 'inoculated' themselves against unwanted charges and so managed their stake in this activity (Edwards & Potter, 1992). What was novel about this study was that stake was managed as either a 'need to' cosmetics to combat the environment, lifestyle and skin complaints, or a 'want to' use centering on wanting to look their 'best'.

The commonality between all four studies was the difficulty of stepping outside of conventional gender identity boundaries, especially for 'metrosexuals' participating in the more-extreme 'metrosexual' activity of facial cosmetics application. What all data covered showed was a heavy reliance on a cultural commonplace that society is predominantly heterosexual comprising two sexes

associated with distinct gendered attributes and category-bounded activities. Therefore, as demonstrated, it is extremely difficult for other non-typical identity categories such as the 'metrosexual' to emerge, which encompass attributes or activities conventionally associated with the opposite sex. Those identifying with these risk being positioned as 'defective' or 'phony' (Sacks 1992, Schegloff 2007) and frequently face high levels of moral accountability for their transgressions (Jayyusi 1994). Indeed, such transgressions still often result in abusive comments (and behaviours), many of which can be seen to have materialised from dominant or 'hegemonic' (Connell, 1998) notions of appropriate masculinities and behaviours. The continued pull of conventional masculinities is highlighted by 'metrosexuals'' moves to masculinise their activities and behaviours. The datasets presented showed examples such as a requirement of the workplace, to combat skin defects and extreme sports, self-respect, sexual success and many others. What this indicates is that it is too early to say yet whether 'metrosexuality' does indeed constitute a 'new masculinity' as some might claim (Simpson, 2004). But what this research does indicate, is that dominant forms of masculinity are continually being challenged by contemporary demands on men such as changes in the requirements of work or the increasing need to market oneself in an image conscious society. In doing so this research highlights how men, including myself, must rework dominant notions of masculinity in order maintain their 'manliness' whilst accommodating these changes.

At this point it is worth pausing to reflect on the development of my own biography throughout the research process. Admittedly, this hasn't really appeared in the main body of text since my note on the origins of the idea in the Introduction. Yet these has been a personal journey that has run parallel involving feelings, dreams, biases, frustrations and thought and action changes. Sometimes this has been direct

relation to the research process whilst at others it has been those more about self-analysis.

A thesis generally begins with an extensive literature review and this one was no different. The review began with newer literature on ‘metrosexual masculinity’ (Coad, 2008) and older more influential writings on traditional masculinities. I had been exposed to the notion of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1995) early on in my MSc studies and wondered why this notion of masculinity didn’t really make personal sense. The closest I could relate to it was in attempting to walk one hundred miles non-stop and enduring masses of pain for elitist glory. Yet, I had no trouble in dispatching with this in favour of a much more softer and inclusive masculinity in intimate settings with one’s partner, family and close friends. The feeling that ‘hegemonic masculinity’ was a defunct concept in a modern world became more pronounced on encountering sociological readings of ‘metrosexual masculinity’ and empirical studies on masculinities in other non-typical gender environments (Simpson, 2005). In these I related to other men that saw more conventional men (blokey types) and their masculinities as antiquated. Indeed, I almost despised them for their non-progressiveness, perhaps also rejecting my previous life as bricklayer and bodybuilder. Yet I always felt the need to ‘man up’ in their company or with women who favoured such types for risk of being caste as ‘soft’.

The collision of my increasing Internet usage and the recognition of social influences on identity drew my attention to electronic talk and the absence of visual cues and ease of expression (DeHaan et al., 2012). Combined with a grounding in discursive psychology I explored how self-identified ‘metrosexuals’ constructed the parameters of their identity and how they did this in the online company of others wondering whether similarities could be drawn between personal experiences and



theirs. As I've demonstrated throughout this thesis, 'metrosexuals' reframe their non-typical masculine identities with recourse to more conventional masculine markers, which resonated with my own. In particular, individualism and the identity of the 'gender rebel' (Wetherell, & Edley, 1999), the specialist (Simpson, 2005) and on occasion physically tough, hardy and resilient, ultimately with both fe/male heterosexual recognition. The evidence of past notions of masculinity along with the identities of the modern man suggested that many masculinities, including my own, are now more multifaceted and inclusive (Anderson, 2005; 2008) but also that the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' shouldn't be dispatched too early.

The outcomes of this research has fed into my current and intended future research trajectories. A current project aims to develop our understanding of how men construct and negotiate masculinities in relation to other 'metrosexual' practices such as 'manscaping'<sup>9</sup>. I focus on how men account for pubic hair shaving to enhance image. I am discursively analysing online electronic talk in response to an advert promoting male groin grooming showing the complex ways in which men discursively negotiate their interest in this non-typical gender practice. The preliminary analysis shows how many men sweep charges of vanity under the carpet in favour of heterosexual pleasure, cleanliness, self-respect and individuality. Similarly, I aim to examine men in another non-typical gender context. I want to explore male breast cancer sufferers' accounts in an online cancer support forum. Drawing on discourse analysis, which examines how men discuss their illness in relation to the self, their family, friends and support community, but also their treatment and their relationships with health-care professionals. In particular I will

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<sup>9</sup> 'Manscaping' refers to men removing in full, or in part, body hair from regions such as the eyebrows, eyelashes, armpits, pubic region, legs, abdomen, chest and back.

focus on how sufferers' and others' notions of masculinity are challenged and reworked to make sense of their experiences.

Yet not withstanding these interesting analytical avenues, this thesis studied 'metrosexual' talk in four online settings deploying a mix of membership categorisation and discursive psychological perspectives in order to provide an empirically grounded description of an array of discursive practices drawn upon to do this identity. The analyses showed that both 'metrosexuals' and 'non-metrosexuals' orientated to this new masculine identity as predominantly based on image conscious practices. Men's fascination with self-grooming was positioned and reframed in relation to dominant masculinities with recourse to traditional masculine markers. Therefore, this thesis demonstrates that 'metrosexuality' is still bound up with more traditional notions of masculinity of how men 'should' or 'need' to behave. It is this conclusion, drawn from studying the online discursive texts of 'metrosexual' and 'non-metrosexual' in relation to the 'metrosexual' phenomenon where this thesis makes its main original contribution to knowledge.

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# Appendix

## Modern Masculine Identity Categories

*Gastrosexual*: A male, aged 25-44, upwardly-mobile and aware of and passionate about global cuisine, and he cooks to impress and seduce... (PurAsia, 2008: 3).

*Hipster*: Hipsters are a subculture of men and women typically in their 20s and 30s that value independent thinking, counter-culture, progressive politics, an appreciation of art and indie-rock, creativity, intelligence, and witty banter (Urban Dictionary, 2013)

*Martha Studly*: The guy who has a set of variously sized throw pillows that not only match each other, complement the living room upholstery and decor concept but accent the next room's assemblage as well (AskMen.com, 2007).

*Mentertainers*: guys who are taking over when it comes to planning dinner parties and cooking (Metro, 2009).

*Primp*: A very well groomed guy who always has women around, but never seems to go for any one in particular. Behind his back, people speculate about his sexuality. More of a "straight gay guy" than a "gay straight guy," to use Sex and the City terminology (AskMen.com, 2007).

*Renaissance Man*: An older term referring to the early modern era, when ancient scientific and artistic knowledge was revisited in a flurry of creation. Refers to a well-rounded, sophisticated, worldly individual with interests in many areas and expertise in several (AskMen.com, 2007).

*Skexual*: A male or female whose sexuality—and sometimes even sex—is so impossible to determine that s/he just seems sketchy from the get-go (AskMen.com, 2007).

*SNAG (Sensitive New Age Guy)*: A guy that women like to talk to like one of their own, and find attractive because they can. Refers more to sensitivity, without the narcissism and preening associated with metrosexuality (AskMen.com, 2007)

*Übersexual*: A man with a type of masculinity that combines the best of traditional manliness (strength, honor, character) with positive traits traditionally associated with females (nurturance, communicativeness, cooperation)... (Salzman et al., 2005: 167).