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Reconsidering the Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: Discursive Psychology, Conversation Analysis and Participants' Orientations

This article provides a critical review of Wetherell and Edley's (1999) discursive reformulation of the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity'. While I retain some familiar features from Wetherell and Edley's approach, I develop a discursive perspective that is located more firmly in the technical, conversation analytic tradition – as outlined in the recent exchange between Schegloff (1997, 1998) and Wetherell (1998). In particular, I argue that previous research is based on the assumption that we need to venture further than the limits of the text to explain why participants say what they do, and go beyond participants' orientations to be able to say anything politically effective. Using data from two semi-structured interviews with men in their early 20s, I explore how participants construct masculinity and situate themselves (and others) in relation to those constructions. This involves an analysis that is more attentive to participant orientations and gendered category membership than that used in the analysis of masculinity so far. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this approach for feminist psychology.

Key Words: *conversation analysis, discursive psychology, gender identity, hegemony, masculinity, participant orientations*

In recent years there has been a growing interest in theorizing masculinity from a discursive perspective. This has been documented in this journal (Coyle and Morgan-Sykes, 1998; Gough, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Willott and Griffin, 1997) and elsewhere (Edley and Wetherell, 1997, 1999; Gough, in press; Gough and Edwards, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1998). The main aim of these theorists has been to outline the ways in which oppressive forms of masculinity are discursively instantiated, maintained and reproduced.

One of the central concepts used in this endeavour has been that of 'hegemonic masculinity'. The notion of 'hegemony' originates with Gramsci (1971), and it is

used to define the maintenance of social power by certain groups, through persuasion and other means. Unlike ideology, however, hegemony invokes power by consent rather than by coercion. The ruling classes, for example, maintain their domination by defining and legitimating a certain definition of the situation, framing the way events are understood and morality is defined. Consequently, the organization of society seems natural, inevitable and ordinary (Donaldson, 1993: 645).

The concept has been developed and applied to masculinity by Connell (1987, 1995) and colleagues (Carrigan et al., 1985) and has been subject to various refinements and applications. Although the term is commonly used, it is rarely explicated in a way that can be easily applied to data. Thus, it has been described as a notion 'as slippery and difficult as the idea of masculinity itself' (Donaldson, 1993: 644). This difficulty and 'slipperiness' is demonstrated perfectly in Connell's own somewhat convoluted definition. For him, hegemonic masculinity is 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (1995: 77). However, such impenetrable definitions give little sense of how we might be able to find such a thing, or identify it in our data.

Some consensus does seem to exist around the defining characteristics of the hegemonic ideal, which are 'naturalized' in the form of the hero in films (such as 'Rambo'), books and sporting events (Donaldson 1993: 646). Therefore, in this society, and at this moment in history, dominant or 'hegemonic' masculinity equals white, heterosexual, successful masculinity. Indeed, Donaldson argues that heterosexuality and homophobia are its 'bedrock' (1993: 645). Although it is argued that many men do not live up to the culturally hegemonic type, they do, none the less, benefit from its existence and are 'complicit' in sustaining it (Edley and Wetherell, 1995: 129). In this respect, it is not *determinate* of identity, but there is space for resistance, with subordinate forms constantly striving for ascendancy (1995: 165).

Recently, researchers have begun to express 'worry about how scholars are using Connell's hegemonic masculinity concept' (Martin, 1998: 473). As Edley and Wetherell argue, 'there are some areas of ambiguity . . . and it is not quite clear . . . just what counts as hegemonic masculinity' (1995: 129). Indeed, it has been described as a 'hybrid term', which, under the guise of explaining everything, actually explains nothing (Miller, 1998: 194–5). Given such conceptual confusion, and despite – or perhaps – *because* the concept has become so influential over the past decade, it is hardly surprising that hegemonic masculinity, along with the concept of 'hegemony' itself, is the subject of a theoretical and methodological critique (see Wood, 1998).

In a recent publication (Wetherell and Edley, 1999; see also 1998) Wetherell and Edley offer one of the most comprehensive critiques of hegemonic masculinity to date. In this article, I critically review their analysis, and, following Edwards (1997) and Potter (1996a), I develop a discursive approach located more

firmly in the technical, conversation analytic tradition (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; ten Have, 1999), as outlined in the recent exchange between Schegloff (1997, 1998) and Wetherell (1998), and subsequently with Billig (1999a, 1999b; Schegloff 1999a, 1999b). Using data from two semi-structured interviews with men in their early 20s, I explore whether participants *themselves* orient towards something that analysts have glossed – in more abstract, theoretical contexts – as hegemonic masculinity and, if so, I consider what they are doing with it interactionally.

The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this approach for feminist psychology. Indeed, such a topic is especially relevant given the current debate about the relative status that we should give to analysts' and participants' accounts (Frith, 1998; Frith and Kitzinger, 1998; Kitzinger, 2000), and the question of how (if at all) we can reconcile the concerns of both feminism and relativistic forms of discourse analysis (see, for example, Rosalind Gill's response to Edwards et al. (both 1995), and subsequent commentaries in Hepburn, 2000; and Potter, 1998).¹

A DISCURSIVE APPROACH TO HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Wetherell and Edley's research on masculinity (1998, 1999; Edley and Wetherell 1995, 1997, 1999; Wetherell, 1998) provides a significant contribution to debates at the heart of feminism, discursive psychology and conversation analysis (from hereon DP and CA). Indeed, Wetherell's work has been central in developing the field of DP (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), and in applying discursive psychological ideas to gender and other forms of inequality (Marshall and Wetherell, 1989; Wetherell and Potter, 1992, Wetherell et al., 1987).

DP is a constructionist approach that combines insights from the sociology of scientific knowledge, ethnomethodology, CA and rhetorical analysis (Potter, 1996b). However, it is a rapidly advancing field, and there are now a variety of approaches that claim the label 'discursive'. These vary in the extent to which they combine a poststructuralist and Foucauldian understanding of discourse with an ethnomethodological and/or CA one. Therefore, they each have a slightly different approach to the way discourse, gender and participant orientations (particularly their relation to ideology and 'macro contexts') may be understood (see, for example, the range of different approaches in Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1995).

Wetherell and Edley's discursive approach is based on a combination of ideas from feminism, poststructuralism and ethnomethodology.² They highlight a number of problems with Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. For example, it cannot account for how male identities are 'reproduced', whether more than one hegemonic strategy can exist at any one time, and whether men can experience conflict or tensions as they move from one version of masculinity to another. They highlight its nebulous, 'impossible' nature, arguing, 'as social psychologists

... we wonder about the appropriateness of a definition of dominant masculinity which no man may actually ever embody' (1999: 337).

In particular, they argue that Connell's formulation of hegemonic masculinity, although having a number of advantages, does not help us to understand 'the nitty gritty of negotiating masculine identities' and how such forms actually 'regulate men's lives' (1999: 336). Wetherell and Edley's critique, then, points towards some methodological recommendations. They suggest that 'most emphasis needs to be placed on the exact mobilisation of accounts within a discursive field rather than on semantic content defined a priori' (1999: 352). This is translated into a DP that analyses the ways in which men themselves 'negotiate regulative conceptions of masculinity in their everyday interactions as they account for their actions and produce or manage their own (and others') identities' (1999: 337).

They set about demonstrating the utility of this more 'fine-grained' approach with data from interviews and responses to picture prompts. These data are analysed by examining the way 'men position themselves in relation to conventional notions of the masculine' (1999: 335) and the implications of these positionings. As they explicitly state (and in contrast to the approach I develop here), 'we will not be concerned with the fine detail of the discursive and rhetorical work evident in the specimen extracts' (1999: 339). Drawing on the notion of 'imaginary positions' (1999: 335), they outline three 'relatively global strategies of self-positioning' (1999: 338), otherwise referred to as 'typical discursive paths', 'discursive strategies' or 'psycho-discursive practices', through which members construct themselves as masculine and negotiate membership of this category.

The first pattern identified – that of 'heroic positions' – is the one which, they argue, 'could be read as an attempt to actually *instantiate* hegemonic masculinity' (1999: 340; emphasis in original) and represents the alignment of self with a 'conventional masculine ideal' (1999: 341) or 'man as courageous, physically tough and yet able to keep his cool' (1999: 342). Thus, the three men who they suggest exemplify this position align with such characteristics as the pleasure of being in control, meeting challenges in risky situations (Michael), showing Southerners how to drink (Simon) and accounting for enjoying a violent sport such as rugby in terms of an 'unreflexive and conventionally masculine self' (Graham) (1999: 340–1).

However, Wetherell and Edley argue that this is not the most common form of positioning. With 'ordinary positions' men separate 'self from certain conventional or ideal notions of the masculine which ... get reconstructed as social stereotypes' (1999: 343). Rather than align with macho ideals, these men emphasize their normality and ordinariness. In 'rebellious positions' men also reject 'macho' ideals but, in contrast, 'define themselves in terms of their unconventionality' (1999: 347). They flout social expectations (1999: 347) and take pride in non-conformity (1999: 349).

Wetherell and Edley conclude that both positive and negative implications may derive from their analyses. On the one hand, 'some men do appear to be

abandoning macho masculinity' (1999: 350). On the other hand, however, this does not mean that men are 'beyond gender power' (1999: 351) or that the 'alternative identities' of 'ordinary' and 'rebellious' positions do not work in 'gender oppressive ways' (1999: 350). Sometimes, they argue, 'one of the most effective ways of being hegemonic, or being a "man", may be to demonstrate one's distance from hegemonic masculinity' (1999: 351).

Wetherell and Edley challenge the assumption that hegemonic masculinity is an invariant style or label for a type of man. Instead, they say, men can position themselves in multiple ways, depending on the context (1999: 352). Indeed, they can seem 'both hegemonic and non-hegemonic . . . at the same time' (1999: 353). In short, Wetherell and Edley suggest that we need to give greater emphasis to the numerous and contradictory discursive resources through which hegemonic gender identities are constructed (1999: 352). This type of approach will, in turn, eventually help us to understand 'the reproduction of the social in the psychological' (1999: 354).

Wetherell and Edley's research goes some way towards reformulating the way masculinities may be understood discursively (and they go much further than others in this respect). Indeed, there are several points of overlap between the approach developed by Wetherell and Edley and the more CA-aligned discursive approach that I develop here. Both are committed to exploring 'the constitutive role of discourse' (Wetherell, 1995: 136; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 62) and the variability and action orientation of talk (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 338). Both approaches treat identities as 'actively accomplished' (Edley and Wetherell, 1999: 182; Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 78). Gender is conceived as 'a discursive practice', 'a method of description, not a psychological attribute' (Wetherell and Edley, 1998: 165; Wetherell, 1995: 141). Finally, both approaches are committed to the 'fine-grained' analysis of data.

There are, however, some subtle points of difference in both theory and analysis, which, I argue, relate to Wetherell and Edley's combination of elements from what they describe as 'two competing theoretical "camps"' (1999: 338): the conversation analytic, ethnomethodological camp (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995), and the more Foucauldian inspired, poststructuralist camp (Parker and Shotter, 1990; see Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 338). Wetherell and Edley's 'synthetic approach' enables them to join the 'macro' ('top down') with the 'micro' ('bottom up') emphasis on context (see also, Willott and Griffin, 1997: 111), and, in terms reminiscent of Marx's famous dictum, 'to embrace the fact that people are, at the same time, both the products and the producers of language' (1999: 338), or 'the master, and the slave, of discourse' (Edley and Wetherell, 1997: 206; 1999: 182).

Thus, although Wetherell has argued against the reifying tendencies of some styles of discourse work (Potter et al., 1990), and despite refusing an 'ontological distinction between the discursive and the extra-discursive' (Wetherell, 1995: 140), Wetherell and Edley none the less seem to advocate some form of discursive determinism, treating discourse as itself an extra-discursive, constraining

influence on talk. A CA approach that is concerned to ground its analyses in participants' own orientations is deemed inadequate on its own, needing instead to be subsidized with Foucauldian poststructuralism and/or grounded in Marxian explanations. Wetherell and Edley argue that this approach can account for discursive regularities across time and space, such as 'much broader or more global patterns in collective sense-making' (1999: 338), 'interpretative repertoires' and 'ready-made resources' (Edley and Wetherell, 1999: 182), the 'inter-textual social context' (Wetherell, 1995: 140) and the 'broader social/discursive practices imbued with power' (Edley and Wetherell, 1999: 191).

From this perspective, then, identities are not created anew each time a person speaks, but are developed progressively, over time. They are not fluid resources, but 'a sedimentation of past discursive practices', which can subject and regulate individuals (Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 78–9) or be 'close(d) off' (Wetherell, 1995: 136). Again, echoing Marx, men are both 'positioned by a ready-made or historically given set of discourses' (Edley and Wetherell, 1997: 206) and 'active creator[s]' – both 'practitioner[s]' and 'practised upon' (Wetherell and Edley, 1998: 168).³

A (MORE) CONVERSATION ANALYTIC ALTERNATIVE

Although it is based in psychology rather than sociology, recent discourse work (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996a) is heavily influenced by CA in the Sacks (1995 [1992]) and Schegloff (1997) tradition.⁴ Like CA, DP is concerned with the action orientation and sequential organization of talk. Edwards advocates for DP a form of analysis that takes from Sacks and CA the idea that there is 'no hearable level of detail that may not be significant, or treated as significant by conversational participants' (1995: 580). This includes exploring how participants use membership categories (such as 'girl' or 'woman') interactively⁵ (Edwards 1995, 1998). Although such categories are 'inference rich' and carry subtle nuances of meaning (young and available, mature and part of a couple, and so on), they are also indexical, flexible resources, deployed selectively for a range of interactional tasks. Thus, we categorize ourselves and others differently across different situations and contexts, precisely because our selections are 'not driven by objective category membership, nor a slavish adherence to semantics' (Edwards, 1998: 26).

Unlike CA, discursive psychologists are also concerned with the identification and analysis of ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) and with the rhetorical and argumentative organization of accounts (Billig, 1996). Ideological dilemmas are evident in the way participants attempt to manage dual concerns or conflicting demands for accountability (how to describe one's masculine characteristics without seeming stereotyped, for example), and rhetorical analysis is concerned with the contextually sensitive relationship between different argumentative positions – which may or may not be organized sequentially (Potter, 1996b: 134). DP explores the way people's accounts are designed to counter actual or poten-

tial alternatives, and, 'in turn, to resist being countered' (Potter 1996a: 108).⁶

Participants' orientations are key to understanding the differences between Wetherell and Edley's approach, and the CA-inspired discursive approach developed here. Schegloff, for example, argues that 'one should take for analysis only those categories that people make relevant (or orient to) and which are procedurally consequential in their interactions' (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 4). Participants can be said to 'orient to' something when they treat it as significant for, or pertinent to the interaction at hand (1998: 4–5). Thus, I can 'orient to' what you have said as if it were an invitation, an accusation, or as a joke. I can 'orient to' you as my sister, a teacher, or as a feminist, and so on (1998: 5).⁷ Because the requirement is that these orientations are analytically tractable, the conversation analyst – and the discursive psychologist who wants to remain faithful to CA principles – 'generally avoids trading on analysts' prior assumptions about what might be called ethnographic particulars' (Potter 1997a: 158), including a whole range of demographic and contextual features, such as participants' age, gender, sexual orientation, goals and so on. They treat these things as (potentially) worked up and made relevant in the interaction, not as external determinants (see Widdicombe, 1998b).

Because they adopt an explicitly non-Foucauldian approach to discourse, or 'talk-in-interaction', conversation analysts such as Schegloff, and discursive psychologists such as Edwards and Potter, reject the separation of macro and micro contexts, or the combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.⁸ Rather than asserting that gendered identities are 'positioned' or partially 'constituted' by an 'external public dialogue' (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 7), established 'global patterns' (1999: 8) or that there is some abstract, discursive 'constraint' on people's lives, these theorists would argue that what counts as power and normativity is negotiated and constructed by participants during the course of their interaction. Since this approach is essentially concerned with how contexts are endogenously produced, a technical analysis that pays close attention to participants' orientations and the categorical and sequential features of talk can reveal the in situ workings of these 'ideological' or 'structural' phenomena (see, for example, Drew and Heritage, 1992; Hutchby, 1996; Markova and Foppa, 1991).

Although work in both CA and feminism is developing rapidly, there has been a notable lack of cross-fertilization, and many feminists with an interest in discourse-based research have been reluctant to adopt a more detailed, CA approach to feminist issues (some recent exceptions include Frith and Kitzinger, 1998; Kitzinger, 2000; Kitzinger and Frith, 1999; Speer and Potter, 2000; Stokoe, 1998, 2000). This is primarily because of misgivings about CA's political efficaciousness, practical utility and compatibility with feminist principles (Speer, 1999). In some recent papers, for example, Wetherell and Edley clearly differentiate their approach from the Schegloffian, CA variety (1998: 163; Edley and Wetherell, 1999: 182).

The analytic utility of combining these approaches has been the topic of a recent debate between Wetherell (1998) and Schegloff (1997, 1998) and more

recently between Billig (1999a, 1999b) and Schegloff (1999a, 1999b; see also Stokoe and Smithson, in press; and Weatherall, 2000). This debate addresses the issue of whether a CA approach to participant orientations and the analytic grounding of claims can offer an adequate answer to its own classic question about any piece of discourse – ‘why this utterance now?’ Using data from the same masculinity project as that described above, Wetherell proposes that, although a focus on participants’ orientations (as outlined in Schegloff, 1997) may be ‘extremely revealing’ (1998: 404), ‘a complete or scholarly analysis . . . must range further than the limits Schegloff proposes’ (1998: 388). In contrast, Wetherell’s own, more ‘eclectic’ approach would, she says, be able to answer questions about her data, such as ‘why in this community does it seem to trouble identity to “be on the pull” but multiple sexual encounters can be also successfully framed as “good”?’ (1998: 404). Wetherell’s approach can, in other words, explain the ‘whys’ of talk-in-interaction, when CA seems relevant only to the ‘hows’.

Schegloff, on the other hand, believes that such questions are *not* beyond the scope of CA, and one does not need to turn to ‘concerns extrinsic to the interaction’ to find answers to them (1998: 416). Indeed, the ‘why that now?’ question is, for Schegloff, a pervasive one for the *participants* to a piece of interaction, and they do indeed ‘seem oriented to [these questions] as relevant’ (1998: 415). Therefore, Schegloff warns ‘it would be useful not to underestimate what the reach of CA’s questions is’ (1998: 416), and suggests ‘rather than beginning with gender ideologies . . . the analysis might begin by addressing what the parties to the interaction understand themselves to be doing in it’ (1998: 415).

The issue at stake for Wetherell and Schegloff here, then, is the amount of ‘mileage’ that one can ‘get out of’ this more technical approach to the details of talk. How much of a piece of interaction can it explain? Is it sufficient (for feminists) on its own, or do we need to supplement it with interaction extrinsic analyses? Indeed, in the quote above, Schegloff seems to be ‘throwing down the gauntlet’ of this challenge to researchers interested in gender issues.

In the analysis that follows I take up this challenge and enter the debate by adopting a discursive approach that, following Schegloff, *begins* with an analysis of what is relevant to the participants. Specifically, I look to see just how far an approach that does *not* go beyond participant orientations can take us in our understanding of masculinity. I explore whether participants do indeed attend to something that has been glossed in more theoretical contexts as ‘hegemonic masculinity’, and examine what such ‘attending to’ is doing interactionally.

In line with recent discourse work (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996a), I retain some familiar elements from Wetherell and Edley’s discursive approach. For example, I explore the way masculinities are rhetorically constructed and deployed by participants in the management of certain interactional dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988), paying close attention to the variability (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and indexicality (Garfinkel, 1967) of resources. Unlike Wetherell and Edley, however, and in line with Schegloff’s emphasis on the endogenous pro-

duction of ‘macro’ contexts, I do not assume in advance of the analysis that we need to venture further than the limits of the text to explain *why* participants say what they do, or that we need to go *beyond* participant orientations to be able to say anything politically effective. I adopt a more technical, CA sensitivity to my data (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; ten Have, 1999), and an analysis that is more attentive to participant orientations (Schegloff, 1997) and gendered category membership (Edwards, 1998; Hopper and LeBaron, 1998; Sacks, 1995 [1992]; Stokoe, 1998) than that used in the analysis of masculinity thus far.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES

The extracts used here are taken from two semi-structured interviews with men in their early 20s, and form part of a much larger corpus of data from a project looking at the construction of gender in talk about sport and leisure. In both interviews I asked the men if they thought that factors associated with their identity (such as age and gender, for example) influenced their leisure in any way. I chose these extracts as examples of accounts where the relationship between masculinity and certain behaviours – or ‘category bound activities’ (Sacks, 1995[1992]) – becomes salient for participants.⁹ Each extract is headed with information containing the transcriber’s initials, the date of the interview, the page where the extract appears in the original transcript and the participants’ (pseudonymized) names (see Appendix for transcription conventions). I chose extracts from the same interviews precisely because I want to highlight the degree of variability in the construction of and degree of alignment with masculinity in the participants’ accounts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

DIFFERENTIATION

(i) *Masculinity as ‘Extreme’*

Consider the following extract. We join the interaction at a point where Sue has just queried how she can ask her participant, David, a question designed for female participants (‘do you think you ever behave in a way that’s not traditionally feminine?’). He responds with a suggested version of just such a question.

Extract 1: SAS 23/3/97: 28 S: Sue; D: David

- 1 D: Well you could say (.) do you ever (.) °think you behave in a
- 2 way that’s not traditionally [masculine?]^o
- 3 S: [Masculine.] Okay then. (.)
- 4 [Do you?]
- 5 D: [You know] the whole masculine (0.8) image of (.) what you
- 6 should be. ↑Er:m (.) °yeah. Well I don’t think (0.8) I (.) comply
- 7 to the real^o (2.4) well there’s differen- you know the extreme

- 8 (1.0) form of (0.4) the laddish image I don't () [live up to.]
 9 S: [Yeah.]
 10 Yeah. [But]
 11 D: [But] (.) even at the best of times now I don't think I do.
 12 (0.8) Because I don't (.) I don't try and pull all the time, I don't
 13 (0.6) feel obliged to drink lots. (1.0) I d- I'm not very (0.8) I'm
 14 not overly competitive in sport.

In this extract, David identifies something that one might gloss – from a superficial reading – as hegemonic (or ‘heroic’) masculinity. He refers to the ‘laddish image’ and outlines its apparently limited category boundedness (‘pulling’,¹⁰ ‘drinking’ and being ‘competitive in sport’ [lines 12–14]). This three-part list (Jefferson, 1990), which refers to different features of the same ‘masculine’ phenomenon, and David’s reference to ‘what you should be’ (lines 5–6) construct masculinity as having a normative nature, and as something prescriptive rather than reflective of the ‘type’ of man David is.

However, it does not automatically follow that we should interpret this as meaning that hegemonic masculinity actually exists as an identity (and conclude that, because David constructs and then seems keen to differentiate himself from such a form of masculinity, he is not a hegemonic person). Instead, the interaction provides clues as to why, on this occasion, David constructs masculinity in such a way (or – as it is framed in the Wetherell and Schegloff debate – ‘why this utterance now?’). In fact, this construction helps him to manage an interactional dilemma, which alternative, less technical analyses may miss.

For example, David to some extent ‘lands himself in it’ in the opening sequence by helpfully reformulating Sue’s question. Being asked whether you ever behave in a way that is not ‘traditional’ is something that can be risky to respond to, and David’s speech is audibly quieter at the moment of asking the question (which may signal his orientation to some problem with its contents [line 1]). If he responds ‘yes, I do cooking, sewing and flower arranging’, then he may risk seeming effeminate and thus not in a position to talk about (his own) masculinity at all. However, if he replies, ‘no, I always act in such a traditional fashion’, thus identifying fully with the category, he may risk seeming conformist, or stereotypical – a dope who lacks authenticity. Therefore, David is faced with a dilemma, or conflicting demands for accountability. On the one hand, he is a man, with the category entitlement that brings (who better to comment on what it’s like to be a man than a man? [Potter, 1996a]), *and* he is someone who – for the purposes of a social science investigation – is asked to hold masculinity accountable. How does he do this without undermining his position as a ‘proper’, normal man (maintaining his entitlement to speak as such) and retain some sense of being authentically individual or unique (see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995; Widdicombe, 1998a). David’s orientation to and attempt to manage this dilemma is evident in the data. For example, he makes a distinction between the type of man he himself is and the type of man (or ‘image’) he wishes

to hold accountable. It is in the service of this distinction (and the dilemma it is designed to manage) that David's particular version of 'extreme' machismo is deployed.

For example, when David is talking about the type of man he is *not*, he repairs 'real' to 'extreme' (line 7). Whereas 'real' would implicate David as somehow 'unreal' and less authentically a man (the long 2.4 second pause may signal some interactional trouble with this construction and David's orientation to the dilemmatic nature of these issues (line 7), the 'extreme (1.0) form of (0.4) the laddish image' (lines 7–8) allows David to construct traditional masculinity as somehow unreasonable and 'other' by virtue of its extremity. It is then perfectly reasonable for David to differentiate himself from it and assert that he is not such a man.

David subtly *constructs* the meaning of masculinity in such a way that makes the business of differentiation less problematic and more rhetorically persuasive. Because all words and categories contain rhetorical affordances, they can be used contrastively to bolster an argument (Edwards, 1999). In this extract, for example, David not only constructs the version of masculinity that he chooses to hold accountable *as* extreme, but also uses a number of extreme case formulations ('at the best of times' [line 11], and 'pull all the time' [line 12], for example) that present the most extreme case in a statement, working contrastively with other alternative interpretations, rhetorically warding them off (Pomerantz, 1986).

There is, then, a *dual* sense in which masculinity is worked up as extreme, and this dual sense of extremity works as an interactional resource, helping David manage the conflicting demands of the interview situation. He draws attention to masculinity as a category, an extreme image or ideal type, which he is then able to distance himself from and contrast with his authentically real, less extreme and more reasonable version (Day, 1998).

A participant's construction of masculinity and the way they situate themselves in relation to it is never final. Identities are constantly in motion, created anew with each turn of talk. Dilemmas are not so much resolved as constantly in flux. Indeed, there are a different set of concerns attended to in the following extract, which comes several turns later.

(ii) *Masculinity as 'Self-Confidence'*

Extract 2: SAS 23/3/97: 28 S: Sue; D: David

- 1 D: Well I d-hhh. I wouldn't do it but I'd like to be able to. I'd like
- 2 to (1.0) have the self-confidence and the (0.8) the (0.8)
- 3 approach that would get (me there.) -I wouldn't=
- 4 S: =Yeah.
- 5 D: I don't think I would do it if I could but.
- 6 S: What do you think women think of these blokes that do that?
- 7 (1.0)
- 8 D: I don't ↑know. C'z (1.8) you would have thought that they'd
- 9 (0.4) be wary of them.

- 10 S: [Yeah.]
 11 D: [And.] of their reputation, and er (0.4) avoid them, but then
 12 (0.6) they're always still the ones that seem to pull, and
 13 they're always the ones that attract the women. (0.6) The re-
 14 the really self-confident ones that are out-going an -and -and
 15 do pull all the time and ar -are known to've snogged everybody
 16 in sight.

We join this extract at a point where Sue has just asked David if he 'admires' the men who – in his words – 'cop off¹¹ two or three times a night' and 'always end up going back for a shag'. Again, David orients towards some version of masculinity that an analyst concerned with abstract generalizations might gloss as 'hegemonic'. These 'blokes' are 'confident' and 'out-going', have 'snogged¹² everybody in sight' and 'pull' women easily (lines 14–16). Although this construction is similar to the one we saw in extract 1 (again, extreme case formulations are used in line 12 onwards for their contrastive effect), notice that masculinity is given its precise meaning on this occasion with the repetition of the notion of 'self-confidence' (lines 2 and 14). This is significant for the identity it helps David portray and the interactional contingencies it is deployed to manage.

For example, David is asked a question about whether he 'admires' the men who engage in behaviours that he has previously differentiated himself from (in extract 1). In answering this question, David has to negotiate a path through two, possibly negative (for his identity), alternatives. He could, for example, say that he does *not* admire these men, but might risk distancing himself from an identity that is (commonly thought to be) culturally exalted (to be sexually successful is to be a 'proper' man). Alternatively, he might say that he *does* admire them, but might then seem hypocritical, buying back into the extreme machismo that he has just been working to hold accountable. Again, we do not need to go beyond the data to find evidence of this dilemma. We can see David attending to the question as troublesome in the audibly exasperated 'Well I d-hhh.' (line 1) and the three, noticeably considered pauses in 'I'd like to (1.0) have the self-confidence and the (0.8) the (0.8) approach' (lines 1–3). This particular construction enables David to manage these implications in a way that does not undermine his own identity.

For example, 'self-confidence', like other categories, is inferentially rich (Sacks, 1995 [1992]). It is a fairly safe, non-gendered notion, a domain of one's personality that it is legitimate to want more of, and yet also something one might not be held accountable for lacking. However, it is also a flexible, indexical *resource*, which is used, on this occasion, for some interactionally sensitive business. In this case, David's lack of success with women is not because he's not handsome or sexually attractive enough. It is simply that he lacks confidence. The ultimate reason why David is unsuccessful with women, however, is constructed as a result of *choice* rather than *incapacity*. For example, the 'I wouldn't do it but I'd like to be able to' and 'I don't think I would do it if I could' constructions

(lines 1 and 5) suggest that David would like to have the *ability* to attract women, but would not choose to exemplify the *behaviour*, even if he were able to.

Moreover, when David is asked ‘What do you think women think of these blokes that do that?’ (line 6), he works to avoid the implication that his own behaviour is somehow questionable, by distinguishing between what one would ordinarily *think* to be the case and what is *actually* the case: ‘you would have thought that they’d (0.4) be wary of them . . . but then (0.6) they’re always still the ones that seem to pull’ (line 8 ff.). David constructs this as a weird, perhaps illogical *phenomenon* (which women irrationally collude in, despite all the negative evidence about these men’s reputations [lines 11 and 15–16]), rather than something peculiar or intrinsic to himself. Indeed, it is the simultaneously negative slant given to women and the masculine activity of ‘pulling’ that helps David manage his own identity and present himself as a reasonable person.

The extracts considered so far have come from the same interview. It could, then, be argued that David is somehow unique in his construction of and degree of alignment with masculinity. However, in the next extract, a second interviewee – also a man in his early 20s – orients towards a strikingly similar construction of masculinity and, again, differentiates himself from it, although this time through a more direct denial of possessing criterial features (Widdicombe, 1998a: 58).

(iii) *Masculinity as Inauthentic*

Extract 3: SAS 27/12/97: 36 S: Sue; B: Ben

- 1 S: >what would you say to people< who think say (0.4) that what you do
2 is geeky? If anyone said ‘you’re an anorak’. You like Star Trek. ↑You
3 haven’t talked about ↑Star Trek.
4 B: Yeah. (0.6) ↑Erm. (1.8) what would I say?=
5 S: =Or you’re a typical BL:oke.
6 B: I’m not a typical bloke, I think I’m very different.
7 S: °In what ways?°
8 B: Well I’m (.) I’m not one of these (0.4) lads, I s’pose if you can label it
9 as a ↑lad=
10 S: =Wha’s a lad then? (.) leisure-wise?
11 (1.0)
12 B: Goes out on the ↑pull. (0.6) Goes out jus- (.) on a weekend just to get
13 totally stoned or to pull a woman. (0.8) I’m not that kind of ↑person.
14 (0.4) I’m more a (0.4) sort of (0.8) e-erm (1.8) well, like l-looking in
15 on the world from outside (.) sort of person (.) er, a window on the
16 world person.

The first thing to note about this extract is the way Sue’s opening question links Ben’s leisure pastimes with potentially negative identity characteristics: ‘geek’, ‘anorak’,¹³ and, later, ‘typical bloke’. Ben delays his response until line 6, where he asserts categorically that he is not such a man: ‘I’m not a typical bloke,

I think I'm very different'. Again, like David in the previous two extracts, Ben uses extreme case formulations to construct the typicality of 'bloke' or 'lad' behaviour: 'Goes out jus- (.) on a weekend just to get totally stoned or to pull a woman' (lines 12–13). This extremity helps him build a rhetorical contrast case, an alternative identity, that vividly differentiates him from the traits that Sue accuses him of possessing, earlier in line 1 (albeit in a thinly disguised hypothetical form: '>what would you say to people< who think . . .'). Unlike these 'typical blokes', Ben is contemplative, thoughtful and distant: a 'looking in on the world from outside (.) sort of person (.) er, a window on the world person' (lines 14–16). In the space created by rejecting the 'typical bloke' or 'lad' identity, Ben forges a special and unique alternative.

We might infer, on the basis of a purely cursory analysis of the data so far, that, because both David and Ben describe masculinity in similar ways across extracts, they are attending to the objective existence of what analysts have termed 'hegemonic' or 'dominant' masculinity. However, this inference would miss the subtle and context-sensitive nature of their descriptions. It is in the particularities of these descriptions, for example, where most of the interactional work gets done. The participants construct masculinity differently on each occasion (as 'extreme', 'traditional', about 'self-confidence', or whatever), depending on the particular identity/ies that are at stake and the work that needs to be done to manage them. They choose from among the words and inferences available to them in culture, using them contrastively (Edwards, 1999), building a rhetorically effective position from which to differentiate themselves, and developing an alternative, more authentic identity.

These types of descriptions are common to accounts where one's genuineness or authenticity may be questionable (Sacks, 1984; Wooffitt, 1992). Indeed, Wetherell and Edley discuss this in their analysis of 'ordinary positions' (1999: 343), identifying a contrast (for their participants) between 'ordinary' masculinity and 'some version of the macho man as an archetype, simplification, or extreme caricature' (1999: 345).

An alternative way to construct masculinity and avoid resisting membership of a category outright, is to identify with or embrace elements commonly associated with the category, while portraying that embracing as a lack of *choice*. In other words, the speaker uses choice as a *resource* to manage alignment (with the category of masculinity) and differentiation (in terms of their own accountability) at the same time. Consider the use of this strategy in the next extract, which is taken from the same interview as extracts 1 and 2.

(PARTIAL) ALIGNMENT

(i) *Masculinity as a Determined 'Mind-Set'*

Extract 4: SAS 23/3/97: 18 S: Sue; D: David

- 1 S: Right. Do you think the fact you're male affects your
 2 leisure in an[y way?]
 3 D: [Yes] Yeah.
 4 S: How?
 5 (1.0)
 6 D: hh. Well it's just a mind-set isn't it -it's -it's what you're
 7 indoctrinated with when you grow up. (1.0) Sport for blokes is a
 8 must win, must beat the opposition, grind them into the dust
 9 sort of thing, (.) and going out is a must drink fifteen pints,
 10 throw up, have a fight, and pull.

In direct contrast to David's portrayal of extreme machismo in extracts 1 and 2, here we have one of the most graphically deterministic constructions of masculinity one would think possible. Indeed, we now get some idea of the level of variation in both the construction of and degree of alignment with masculinity *in the same interview*. Here maleness is a 'mind-set' – it is 'indoctrinated' and is representative of things one 'must' do. It is normative and prescribed, ingrained from 'when you grow up' (lines 6–10), and very much something David is subjected to (as opposed to responsible for).

We begin to understand why David should so patently contradict himself (or 'why this utterance now?') if we look in closer detail at the opening sequence. First of all, David does not answer the question about leisure and his maleness ('Do you think the fact you're male affects your leisure in any way?' [lines 2–3]) in quite the way one would expect, given that he is asked a probing 'how?' question (rather than an account-seeking 'why?' question) in line 4.

Rather than provide a description of *how* his maleness affects his leisure (such as 'I do all those traditionally masculine pursuits like rock-climbing, cricket etc', which he has mentioned elsewhere in the interview are pursuits he enjoys), David instead provides an account of *why* maleness affects his leisure: 'Well it's just a mind-set isn't it -it's -it's what you're indoctrinated with . . .' (lines 6–7), thus treating the question about gender as a possibly problematic, instantly accountable issue. A clue to this response may lie in the fact that the categories 'man' and 'woman' are inferentially associated with different sports and activities and were David *not* to engage in 'manly' pursuits (being quite obviously a man), he might be seen as accountably strange, other or different. David cannot (easily) deny his maleness, but in responding 'yes' to the question and then explaining *how* it affects his leisure, he opens himself up to being just like any 'typical' man and, again, not an authentic individual. His spontaneous accounting here, therefore, along with the portrayal of men's leisure as socially determined rather than freely chosen, may stem from his attending to the possibility that he might somehow be

to blame for being 'typical' (or, worse, stereotypical) by virtue of his maleness – and all in front of a female, perhaps feminist, social science interviewer.

David denies responsibility for the link between his maleness and his behaviour, and cannot be held accountable for it. This is a negative construction of his *own* masculinity, very unlike the identity of choice David portrays in the other extracts.

(ii) *Masculinity as a 'Mask'*

Extract 5: SAS 23/3/97: 18 S: Sue; D: David

- 1 S: But what are the characteristics of laddishness then? I mean
 2 do you try and emulate these characteris[tics?]
 3 D: [°No] no° but it's=
 4 S: =Na(h)tura(h)l (hh)
 5 D: ((laughs)) it's a very -it's a peer pressure thing, it's -
 6 laddishness is all a peer pressure thing . Everybody -it's the
 7 mask thing you know? A group of lads, (.) just first arrived at
 8 university, (.) some rugby players amongst them, some big
 9 drinkers amongst them,
 10 S: Mm
 11 D: some people that like to try and pull all the time, (.) and (.)
 12 everybody's (.) – everybody wears the mask the 'hey (no)' you
 13 know, tough macho 'I can pull all the time, I (.) can drink lots, I
 14 can fight' and all this
 15 S: Mm=
 16 D: =and anybody that doesn't try and live up to that is -is sco:rned
 17 by the group

Masculinity is given a slightly different meaning in this extract. The image of social determinism continues with the use of lay social scientific examples. 'Laddishness' is a result of 'peer pressure' (lines 5 and 6) and is subject to social sanction: 'anybody that doesn't try and live up to that is -is sco:rned by the group' (lines 16–17). Moreover, this is not an authentic and 'real' self, but is a 'mask' that you 'wear' (lines 7 and 12) (David's lay version of 'gender as performance' [see Marshall and Wetherell, 1989]). Indeed, the reason for this particular construction may be prompted by Sue's question about whether David tries to 'emulate' masculinity (lines 1–2), which makes the issue of authenticity and choice directly relevant.

For example, to suggest that someone might *emulate* a characteristic is to imply that they are not *authentically* that person at all – a point attended to by Sue's tease in line 4 suggesting it is 'natural' (see Drew, 1987). One way to avoid the negative implications of responding 'yes, I try to emulate masculinity', then, is to suggest one is laddish simply because one has no choice in the matter, thus further distancing one's accountability or responsibility for being just such a person.

Having provided numerous examples to demonstrate this lack of choice, however, a few turns later (and in response to the local interactional circumstances) David's tack changes slightly. Having deferred accountability to such a great extent, he now reclaims some agency and responsibility.

(iii) *Masculinity as a 'Hive Mind'*

Extract 6: SAS 23/3/97: 19 S: Sue; D: David.

- 1 S: So were you put in that situation then?
 2 D: No coz I -I -I picked who I hung a -hung about with very
 3 carefully, but -well not carefully but I just happened- you know
 4 like attracts like and you hang about with people who are like
 5 yourself [()]
 6 S: [Who are] not 'laddish' then?
 7 D: Yeah I was lucky to- >but there was still the laddish< (1.0) er
 8 only -only as far as -as drinking went definitely coz I -I was in
 9 (.) -I was on like two or three of my group were big drinkers and it was
 10 'you've got to match pint for pint at the same rate of drinking
 11 as I do or else you're queer, or else you're weak, or else you're a
 12 Southerner' you know and that's [(all this)]
 13 S: [Did they] actually say that?
 14 D: Oh yeah! all the time mm [()]
 15 S: [Yet you] hung around with
 16 these people?
 17 D: No well I was doing it to others as well you know [it's all]=
 18 S: [really?]
 19 D: =it's a -it's a -it's a -a hive mind (.) you know=
 ((lines omitted))
 27 D: and it's -it's like a group mind and everybody (.) thinks the
 28 same and talks the same and you have the same phrases and
 29 you have the same likes and dislikes.

In this extract, which follows almost immediately from the preceding one, the issue is no longer about whether David *tries* to emulate masculinity (cf. line 2, extract 5), but is instead about his own relationship to this peer pressure: 'So were you put in that situation then?' (line 1). In other words, the questioning instigates a move from David as accountable for the behaviour, to David as accountable for having agency or not, and there is selective variation between the two. The interactional benefits of asserting lack of choice are all but gone and what's at stake has changed. To respond 'yes' to this question would paint a tragic picture of David's inability to resist membership if he so chooses. Thus he responds 'No coz I -I -I picked who I hung a -hung about with very carefully' (lines 2–3). However, when his responsibility for 'hanging around' with people who call others derogatory names is at issue (lines 15–16) David reverts again to constructing masculinity as a lack of choice, deferring his accountability and thus

blameworthiness for Sue's implied criticism. Indeed, he finishes several lines later with wonderful images of social contagion, of 'hive minds' (line 19), where 'everybody thinks the same and talks the same' (lines 27–8).

The extracts in this section, like the first three, have tended to portray masculinity as a negative phenomenon. However, although its meaning may *often* be constructed (and oriented towards) as negative (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995), it may also, on certain interactional occasions, be given a more positive gloss. In the account that follows, for example, the speaker relies on the characteristics typically associated with the category of masculinity, to divert attention from another possibly even more accountable or (constructed as) problematic aspect of their identity – their sexuality.

(iv) *The Display of Masculinity in the Management of a Problematic Identity*

We join this extract at a point where the discussion turns to drug-taking, and Ben, in relaying his repertoire of drug experiences, has just announced that he has done a 'blow-back', 'where you take a drag, (.) and breathe into the other person', with a 'lad at erm uni- at college', and that he 'used to do it all the time'.

Extract 7: SAS 27/12/97: 30 S: Sue; B: Ben

- 1 S: >°That's a bit (.) risque<isn't it?°
 2 B: No::
 3 (.)
 4 S: It's like ↑kiss[ing someone]
 5 B: [Actually] yeah it is like kissing- it's like-
 6 almost like French kissing but without tongues.
 7 (1.0)
 8 S: And that's okay?
 9 B: >Yeah it didn't bother me. He was a good mate<
 10 S: hhh. ((laughs))
 11 B: Yeah he- he- when he first said he said 'have you ever
 12 done a blow-back?' We were totally and utterly (.) ss – pissed
 13 out of our heads. And we were laffing our 'eads off coz
 14 we'd already had a couple of (0.6) joints, (0.6) and we were
 15 actually in a- in a hall that wasn't ours, and there was a
 16 telly in there and he said 'that window's open do you fancy
 17 ha(h)ving the te(h)lly(h).'
 ((lines omitted))
 27 He said 'have you ever done a blow-back?' I
 28 said 'what the hell's a blow-back?', he says 'it's where I
 29 take a drag and then pass it on to you (0.8) by like kissing
 30 you', he says 'it's a bit queer but you know it doesn't bother
 31 me if you want.' [I said 'go on then']=
 32 S: [(laughs)]=
 33 B: ='let's have a go. >Because it doesn't bother me<.' (0.8) He said

- 34 'sure?' I said 'yeah no worries'. (1.0) Steve °w's° a bloody
 35 great laugh he was. (0.6) You'd have liked him coz he was a right (.)
 36 lad from Brighton and he was a right down to earth guy.

In stark contrast to Ben's account in extract 3, where he *distances* himself from the 'typical blokes' who go out 'jus- (.) on a weekend just to get *totally stoned*' (lines 12–13; my emphasis), in this extract, in contrast, he tells a story about just such drug-taking behaviour. Unlike in previous extracts, however, here Ben invokes characteristics commonly associated with masculinity, so as to manage what Sue constructs as a potentially problematic *sexual* identity: '°That's a bit (.) risqué< isn't it?°. . . It's like ↑kissing someone' (lines 1 and 4).

For example, in recalling the 'blow-back' incident, Ben does some accountability-reducing scene setting: they were 'totally and utterly (.) ss – pissed out of our heads', 'lauffing our 'eads off', and had 'already had a couple of (0.6) joints' (lines 12–14). These activities are what one might regard as 'laddish' behaviour, which point to the alcohol- and drug-enhanced, 'not to be taken seriously' nature of the occasion. The daredevil antics of the suggestion 'that window's open do you fancy ha(h)ving the te(h)lly(h)' (lines 16–17) contribute to the impression of wild schoolboy pranks (rather than rampant homoeroticism). The whole incident is given innocent immediacy and an unplanned 'spur of the moment' feel by the use of active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992), which again forecloses any suggestion that this activity might represent the expression of some innate desire. This is reinforced further by Ben's display of ignorance: 'what the hell's a blow-back?' (line 28). Thus, the level of detail in this short narrative may provide a warrant, an experiential document of 'being there' (Geertz, 1988, cited in Edwards, 1999: 281) that works to bolster the validity of arguments that may be in danger of being contested (see also Edwards and Potter, 1992). In this case, the danger may be that Ben's behaviour is somehow pre-planned, calculated or inherently meaningful.

Interestingly, although Ben initially *counters* Sue's construction of the 'blow-back' as 'a bit (.) risqué<', and thus problematic in terms of the sexual identity it invokes (line 1), here Ben constructs Steve as already having mentioned, at the time of the incident, the sexual connotations implicit in the 'blow-back' manoeuvre: 'He says 'it's a bit queer but you know it doesn't bother me if you want' (lines 30–1). This is, then, a clever *display* of recognition that retrospectively constructs *and counters* just such inferences, inoculating the speaker from their effects.

Ben's story works to convince us of Steve's (the proposer of the 'blow-back') credentials as a proper 'laddish' 'bloke' in the closing sequence, where Ben says he's a 'great laugh' and argues that Sue would have liked him 'coz he was a right (.) lad from Brighton and he was a right down to earth guy' (lines 35–6). Being 'right' of any characteristic leaves one in little doubt that it is a quality in plentiful supply, and Ben can bask in the glory of his friend's macho credentials. In sum, Ben retains the identity of a 'proper' man by replacing one commonly

othered yet stereotyped category ('queerness'), with another perhaps more acceptable one (masculine activities and 'laddishness'). In doing so, he relies on the traits commonly associated with (and culturally recognizable as) masculinity.

DISCUSSION

This analysis critically reviews and develops several features of Wetherell and Edley's discursive approach. I have shown a number of context-sensitive ways in which participants construct masculinity and align with or differentiate themselves from those constructions. At first glance, or on the basis of a less technical analysis, the analyst might conclude that these participants *seem* to be attending to the existence of something that non-CA researchers have glossed as 'hegemonic' masculinity. For example, Ben and David alternate between alignment with, and differentiation from, a version of masculinity that they define in remarkably similar ways across extracts ('drinking', 'pulling' and 'sport', for example).

However, 'hegemony' and 'hegemonic masculinity' are *not* participants' categories. In its particularities, masculinity is defined and described in *different* ways (as 'extreme', 'typical', about 'self-confidence', an 'image', 'hive mind', a 'mask' and so on), appropriate for the *local interactional context*, and the work that needs to be done to invoke or manage a particular identity/ies. Therefore, it is not simply the degree of *alignment* with (what is constructed as) masculinity that changes but it is also (cf. Wetherell and Edley) participants' *definitions* of masculinity that change. These different descriptions and *uses* of masculinity give it a different *meaning* across contexts. Participants make use, in action, of both the indexical (Garfinkel, 1967) *and* ready-made (or 'inference rich' (Sacks, 1995 [1992])) elements of the category of masculinity. The precise meaning of masculinity is both context-sensitive *and* context-free, and it is this feature of *all* words and categories that helps explain both the similarities (in terms of similar descriptions) *and* differences (in terms of the precise definition and interactional usage of masculinity) across extracts. Thus, masculinity is not a mapping notion. There are a range of rhetorically effective constructions and reconstructions of masculinity that can be applied and reworked to include or exclude the self, and that are tailored to the local business at hand.

Moreover, although the characteristics of masculinity that each participant identifies may well exist 'out there in the world' *for them*, it does *not* mean that we (as analysts) should interpret this as meaning hegemonic masculinity actually exists, or that we might be able to identify a hegemonic person. All that it *does* mean is that a cultural category or way of describing masculinity (that we can all use) exists, and, as I have shown here, *it exists to do business*, and *variable* sorts of business, for the participants. Indeed, a sensitivity to participants' own orientations clearly shows how and *why* identities are 'utterly fluid, variable and context-specific' and are 'made contextually relevant to address contingent interpersonal concerns' (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995: 108).

Despite the potential of the approach shown here, CA is often viewed as an approach that is excessively ‘nit-picking . . . as unable to see beyond the “micro” level of the 0.2-second pause’ (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999: 311). Indeed, many feminist psychologists suggest that we may need to go *beyond* participants’ orientations to be able to say anything politically effective (Frith, 1998; Gill, 1995; Kitzinger, 1992; Wetherell, 1998; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1995: 6). As I have shown in my analysis, however, we do not *necessarily* need to use Foucauldian poststructuralism, or make references to features *extrinsic* to the interaction, to discover something fruitful about the political *uses* to which identity categories can be put, or to reach politically efficacious conclusions. Indeed, this analysis has clearly been able to provide answers to CA’s own classic question about ‘why this utterance now?’, and it is hard to see (in relation to an analysis of the extracts considered here) what going beyond participant orientations would add to our understanding of the reasons for, or workings of, talk. Indeed, the reason why an approach that does *not* go beyond participants’ orientations is so important and radical for feminism is because claims about power and asymmetry, ‘macro contexts’, ‘broader, global patterns’, the ‘inter-textual’, and all things typically conceived as beyond CA’s scope, *are* analytically tractable (Drew and Heritage, 1992; Hutchby, 1996; Markova and Foppa, 1991; Speer, 1999). What better way to convince sceptics of the blatant (or, indeed, subtle) inequalities in society than with a line-by-line demonstration (and validation) of their workings and constitution on the page?

As Wetherell herself has pointed out (1995: 141–2; 1999: 404), it is important not to underestimate discursive psychology’s radical political potential (Edwards et al., 1995; Potter, 1998), a potential which, I believe, has yet to be realized in research on gender issues. For example, if we take a broad view of politics as *rhetoric*, as taking up a position for strategic ends, then discursive psychologists (and conversation analysts), like feminists, are also engaged in a political project, albeit with (often – although not always) different goals. From this perspective, the ‘why that now?’ is a *political* question (for analysts *and* participants), which I have shown that we can answer by focusing on participants’ practices. David and Ben *do* (identity) politics with their talk and actions, and political implications can be built from our analyses of them.

If one of the aims of a radical feminist psychology is to challenge patriarchy and set about ‘ending the social and political oppression of women’ (Wilkinson, 1997: 189), then it makes sense to try to capture the *object* of our critique (or the oppressor) in as much detail as possible, and to understand what talk about or displays of masculinity do for participants. This will hopefully (eventually at least) help us understand how masculinity itself *gets done*, the way it is mobilized for political and strategic ends, how it works as a rhetorical strategy and why men (or indeed women) find it so attractive (indeed – effective) as a resource on certain interactional occasions and not on others. We may then find ourselves in a stronger position from which to undermine or ‘disarm’ it, and to challenge the weapons of patriarchal rhetoric (see also, Widdicombe, 1995).

One problem, of course, is that feminism has traditionally needed to have a stable object (patriarchy, men and so on) that is intrinsically negative, measurable and linked with identity to work with, and against which we can collectively mobilize. There is no room for an 'always indexical' element to masculinity, as one would never be able to pin it down and capture it for long enough to make claims about the workings of social power. To some extent, then, selective reification of the object of our critique is unavoidable (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985).

However, some discursive psychologists (cf. most CA, and see Note 1) have rejected this 'bottom-line' realism in favour of a form of relativism, where all claims (including the researcher's own) are viewed as constructed and partial. There are no independent means of determining what is 'true' (Edwards et al., 1995). Although some feminists, such as Margaret Wetherell, suggest that 'it is entirely possible to be an epistemological relativist and be morally and politically engaged' (1999: 404; and see also Wetherell and Potter, 1992: 66; and Hepburn, 2000), many feminist psychologists claim that relativism is a 'trap' (Jackson, 1998: 61–2) that leads to 'political paralysis' (Wilkinson, 1997: 186). It is destructive, 'nihilistic' (Kitzinger, 1992: 247) and has no 'vocabulary of value' (Gill, 1995). At its worst it constitutes a form of 'ethical relativism' (Kitzinger 1992: 247) that offers no grounds for choosing between competing versions.

One way in which feminists have attempted to manage the dilemma posed by endless deconstruction is to keep their politics separate from their academic life (which avoids rather than overcomes the problem), or to treat politics as primary and use theory and method strategically, depending on their feminist goals. Kitzinger's solution, for example, 'is to be a radical lesbian first, a social constructionist (or essentialist) when it suits my radical feminist purposes, and a 'psychologist', as conventionally defined, virtually never' (1995: 155). However, if, following relativism, we view *all* claims as rhetorical, political and thus strategic, then claims to strategic essentialism become redundant. This need not lead to a form of immorality, or an absence of critique, but will force us to consider the techniques used in claims-making (both our own and those of the 'oppressor') and prevent us from reaching a dangerous, and premature, form of closure.

Although it may be a mistake – or sheer arrogance – to suggest that a CA-informed discursive approach is *better than* feminism at giving voice to its participants (and, as MacMillan argues, 'an inevitable feature of any representation and "speaking for" is a *usurping* of the subject's voice' [1996: 145; my emphasis]), it is nevertheless the case that, as an approach that questions *all* knowledge claims, it is extremely good at exposing the political rhetoric of its own, as well as others', constructions.

This need not lead to weakness, an absence of critique (see Wilkinson, 1997) or some form of self-referential nihilism, but will prevent us from 'reproducing precisely the assumptions we have set out to criticize' (Potter, 1997b: 64), of replacing one 'hegemony of the intellectuals' (Schegloff, 1997: 167) with another.

APPENDIX

Transcription Notation

(.)	Micro-pause
(2.0)	Pause length in seconds
[overlap]	Overlapping speech
◦	Encloses speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk
↑	Rising intonation
LOUD	Talk that is louder than the surrounding speech
<u>Underline</u>	Emphasis
>faster<	Encloses speeded up talk
(Brackets)	Enclose words the transcriber is unsure about (empty brackets enclose talk that is inaudible)
.hhh/ hhh	In-breath/Out-breath
Rea::ily	Elongation of the prior sound
.	Stopping intonation
=	Immediate latching of successive talk
((laughs))	Comments from the transcriber
Funn(h)y	Laughter in speech

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NOTES

1. Although CA is not a relativist approach, like discursive psychology, it treats ‘reality as a members’ phenomenon’ (Widdicombe 1998b: 195).
2. The ethnomethodological features of Wetherell and Edley’s approach differentiate it from the work of critical discourse analysts such as Burman and Parker (1993), Fairclough (1995), Van Dijk (1993) and Wodak (1989).
3. The idea that discourses ‘position’ subjects reifies discourse as a causal agent in its own right. It is hard, in this approach, to account for the ways in which participants may avow or deny a whole range of different identities in the course of one stretch of talk.
4. Potter suggests that there are more similarities than differences between DP and CA (Potter 1996b: 132). This is borne out in Hutchby and Wooffitt’s (1998) introductory

- book on CA, which includes a chapter covering DP and fact construction. In addition, David Silverman, citing the work of Edwards and Potter, suggests that 'at least some DA researchers pay considerable attention to the turn-by-turn organization of talk . . . if this is so, we may end up in a pointless debate about whether such work is DA or CA!' (1998: 193).
5. There is some disagreement about the role of Sacks' work on membership categorization in CA, and whether it represents a decontextualized, reductive model that depends on the investigator's authority, or, like CA, a context-sensitive approach, based on what participants can be shown to be orienting to (see Hester and Eglin, 1997 and Silverman, 1998). Therefore, what counts as CA, like DP, is by no means clear-cut.
 6. Although the analysis of ideological dilemmas and rhetoric is DP rather than CA, it is not incompatible with the focus on participant orientations developed here. For example, participants themselves orient to such dilemmas as relevant, and interact or account accordingly. Rhetorical analysis also shades into CA in its concern with the way members' talk may be designed to address what Hutchby and Wooffitt call a 'wider culturally based scepticism' (1998: 196).
 7. Although Schegloff (1997) claims that gender does not have to be explicitly mentioned or 'indexed' ('he', 'she', 'bloke' and so on) to be 'oriented to', there is some debate about what might count, analytically, as an inexplicit orientation (for further discussion of this issue, see Stokoe and Smithson, in press).
 8. Potter's recent publications (Speer and Potter, 2000, for example) draw more heavily on CA than the earlier 'interpretative repertoire' style of analysis associated with Wetherell and Potter (1992). Margaret Wetherell's work has, on the whole, remained true to the principles of the 1992 book (one exception includes Wetherell's recent work with Charles Antaki (Antaki and Wetherell, 1999), which sits more firmly towards the CA end of the theoretical spectrum).
 9. Although conversation analysts typically prefer 'naturally occurring' materials where the interaction is not shaped by an explicit social science agenda (see Potter and Wetherell, 1995), it is important to note that, for the purposes of the analysis presented here, I am treating the interviewer and interviewee as having a common status as participants. Their interactions are both equally analysable for orientations to masculinity and so on (see Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995, for an example of CA applied to interview data). None the less, an important issue for future research is how gender is made relevant and oriented to in materials that are *not* influenced by social scientific concerns, and thus where gender is *not* explicitly indexed by the researcher.
 10. Although we should be cautious not to make too much of rather rigid, dictionary definitions (and see p. 136, where I discuss the 'inference rich' and indexical properties of categories), for the benefit of readers not familiar with local slang usage, 'pull' is commonly understood as a slang term used to describe the act of 'obtaining' a partner (for the night, or longer). It is important to note, however, that although we may have a sense, as competent cultural members, of what a word means in an abstract sense, it is neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* to understanding precisely what that word is *doing* in an interaction. As Antaki has shown with respect to the utterance 'you look like Fagin', one can understand that an identity ascription has taken place without knowing who the character 'Fagin' is. Neither participants nor analysts 'need special cultural decoding or mental speculation to make that clear' (Antaki, 1998: 76). The same applies to the use of the word 'pull' in this extract. We do not need to know what

'pull' means in an objective sense to know that David is referring to an activity he associates rather negatively with 'extreme' machismo, and that 'pulling' 'all the time' is in the same class of behaviour as being 'obliged' to drink lots and being 'overly' competitive at sport.

11. 'Cop off', like the term 'pull', above, is commonly understood as a slang term that refers to the act of 'obtaining' a partner. However, like 'shag', it has connotations of actual sexual activity (although see my cautions about applying dictionary definitions in Note 10, above).
12. A 'snog' is a slang term for 'kiss and caress'. In this extract, 'snogged' works in combination with 'everybody in sight' and 'pull all the time' as an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) to draw a contrast between David's own activities and the seemingly indiscriminate activities of others.
13. An 'anorak' is another slang term that, like the word 'nerd', is used to describe someone who treats as leisure things typically classed as 'uncool', such as train-spotting and the like. Here, Sue uses 'anorak' in a provocative fashion, placing it in the same class of categories as 'geek' and 'typical bloke'. David's clear rejection of the 'typical bloke' label indicates that he has treated it as a rather negative identity ascription.

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