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GENDER GOALS:

Defining Masculinity and Navigating Peer Pressure to Engage in Sexual Activity

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A significant part of hegemonic masculinity is proving one's heterosexuality though sexual experiences. Peer pressure to conform is particularly acute for adolescent boys and young men. We analyze interviews with 87 boys in middle school, high school, and college about how their masculinity goals and subsequent achievement of those goals influence their navigation of pressure to engage in sexual relations with girls and women to "prove" themselves. Our findings show that, while boys and young men recognize dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity, most do not subscribe to those uncritically. Rather, they struggle to balance personal ideas about masculinity with consistent pressure from others to demonstrate their heterosexuality. As a result, they employ various strategies to negotiate such pressures, including avoidance, acceptance, and outright rejection of this particular expectation. These strategies, however, ultimately contribute to a broader gender culture among adolescents in which expectations and privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity that dominate U.S. culture remain largely unchallenged.

Keywords: *masculinities; adolescence; peer pressure; heterosexuality; gender goals; gender*

A long line of research demonstrates that a significant part of hegemonic masculinity is proving one's heterosexuality and that sexual experiences contribute to a successful performance of a masculine identity

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(Connell 1987; Kimmel 2008; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Pressure to conform is particularly acute for adolescent boys and young men (hereafter, "boys") (Duncan 2012). We examine how individual definitions and ideals of masculinity may mitigate pressure to engage in heterosexual relations and, in doing so, highlight within-group variations sometimes obscured by research on masculinities (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). We further explore the relationship between strategies of resistance and possibilities for overcoming gender inequality.

A growing body of literature examines hybrid masculinities—masculinities that piece together attributes of traditional notions of both femininity and masculinity, creating transformations in men's performance of gender to include more emotional expression and positive views on egalitarianism while upholding the core aspects of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Messner 2007). Drawing on the variations identified in hybrid masculinity, we focus on the specific ideals—what we call gender goals—of individual boys. Such gender goals may shape how a young man sees himself in relation to others and how he behaves, interacts, and reacts. We also account for whether individuals believe they meet or fail to meet their particular goals of masculinity. Individuals failing to attain a desired goal may experience resistance or strain (Agnew 1992) and seek out ways to mitigate that strain, perhaps by conforming to peer pressure, or by resisting and acting against it.

We analyze data from interviews with 87 mostly white and middle-class boys in middle school, high school, and college to understand how masculinity goals and subsequent achievement of those goals influence how boys navigate pressure to engage in heterosexual relations to "prove" themselves. We find that while boys in our sample recognize dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity, most do not aspire to attain those ideals. Rather, they struggle to balance their personal masculinity goals with consistent pressure from their peers to demonstrate their heterosexuality. As a result, they use various interactional strategies to negotiate such pressures, including avoidance, acceptance, and outright rejection of the expectation to engage contemporaneously in heterosexual relations. These strategies ultimately do not challenge the traditional gender order. However, because they are employed by a socially and numerically dominant group of boys, their use provides insight into how social change and challenges might take place.

Sexual Behaviors, Adolescent Masculinity, and Peer Pressure

One aspect of gender socialization and policing is that traditionally masculine boys are expected to pursue girls sexually. Boys of all races and

social classes learn this expectation through television, advertisements, movies, and sexual scripting (Gill 2007; Kane 2013; Martin 1996; Martin and Kazyak 2009). It begins even before puberty (Martin 1996), although the performative pressures and expectations of sexuality may be experienced differently across race, class, and ethnicity, just as they are experienced differently by gender (Anderson 1999; Collins 2004; Smith 2012). For example, ideologies emphasizing the importance of sexual prowess to social status are pronounced among men of color and poor men (Anderson 1999; Widman et al. 2016), especially when other resources are closed or blocked to them (Ferguson 2000; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). However, white, middle-class boys also experience normative pressures to demonstrate sexual athleticism and heterosexual desire, along with other aspects of hegemonic masculinity such as financial and emotional independence (Giordano et al. 2009).

Pascoe (2007) and Duncan (2012) showed how boys assert their heterosexual identity by putting other boys down, calling them homophobic names, or demeaning them in various ways. These "manhood acts" (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) affirm masculinity and allow boys to be included as "one of the guys" with the added benefit of insulating them from homophobic taunts from others. Public practices of compulsory heterosexuality among young men may include emasculating insults, jock talk, or bragging about sexual encounters. Duncan (2012, 6) observed that sexual bullying, sexual harassment, and talk about sex and sexuality are "omnipresent" among boys 12 to 15 years old, finding that "even in interactions that bore no overt reason for the deployment of sexualised verbal abuse, language was funnelled through that discourse." Practices of compulsory heterosexuality and "manhood acts" are, as Schrock and Schwalbe (2009, 287) argued, "inherently about upholding patriarchy and reproducing gender inequality," with women reduced to props to enhance men's image.

During adolescence, young people are susceptible to peer pressure and the harmful consequences associated with it (McCoy et al. 2017), with boys more susceptible to sexual peer pressure than girls (Widman et al. 2016). Discussing sexual experiences is one way young men assert their position among peers and simultaneously establish their masculinity (Butler 1990; Duncan 2012; Pascoe 2007). As Schrock and Schwalbe (2009, 280) put it, boys and men, "if they wish to enjoy the privileges that come from membership in that group—must signify possession of a masculine self." Demonstration of heterosexuality and talk about dating and sex become a resource, a way to accomplish this masculine self (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Research shows that some boys and men negotiate the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, creating a "hybrid" masculinity that incorporates aspects of marginalized or subordinated masculinities or femininities. For example, in events such as Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, men distance themselves from traditional masculinity by wearing women's clothing or standing with women against "bad" men, but still reinforce hegemonic ideals of masculinity such as strength and power (see Bridges and Pascoe 2014). While hybrid masculinities may ultimately reinforce the characteristics and power of hegemonic masculinity, they also open the door for boys to think conscientiously about what masculinity means to them and to what kind of masculinity they aspire. Taking this as a starting point, we ask boys about their goals and how well they think they achieve them and examine what this means for how they deal with peer pressure surrounding sex. Our analysis demonstrates how gender goals are integrated in hybrid masculinity but continue to support hegemonic masculinity.

METHODS

We analyze data from white, middle-class boys in three different age groups and who engage in organized activities that either define (e.g., sports) or challenge (e.g., music) traditional masculinity norms. Research shows that boys involved in organized sports are more likely to learn tenets of hegemonic masculinity (especially from coaches and peers) than those who are not (Messner 1992). In contrast, musical arts are viewed by boys as "gentler pursuits," linked with physical meekness or a more feminine demeanor (Freer 2010). Such stereotypes present challenges for musical boys attempting to negotiate masculine identity development and thus are not an activity that constructs masculinity in a traditional fashion (Harrison 2007). Our research design, comparing band members and baseball players, permits comparisons between boys and men whose activities, theoretically, may yield differing ideals of masculinity.

We capture a snapshot of masculinity formation during adolescence by interviewing boys at different key stages of gender and sexual identity formation (Kane 2012). Middle school is typically a time when students are exposed to sex education and see their bodies undergo pubertal changes; thus, gender becomes a more salient social and visible difference between boys and girls (Martin 1996; Mora 2012; Musto 2014). Highschoolers' lives are often centered around sexuality and sexual drama (Miller 2016); nearly half of American boys have had sex by age 17 (Martinez and Abma 2015). In college, young adults may be living away

TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics

	Middle School	*High School*	*College*
Baseball players, n	12	15	15
Band members, n	15	15	15
Age, median (range)	12.78 (11-14)	16.47 (14-18)	19.6 (18-23)
Percentage white	89	90	90

from home for the first time, and experiencing a culture of sex and "hook up" expectations on a different scale than in high school (Wade 2017).

Duckworth conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews with 87 boys enrolled in middle school (MS n=27), high school (HS n=30), and college (n=30) about definitions of masculinity and experiences with peer pressure regarding sexual behavior. Approximately half in each age group played baseball and half were in band. The middle and high schools are in the same school district, and graduates traditionally attend the local university, creating great similarity in demographic characteristics among subjects. Our sample reflects the racial/ethnic composition of these schools; they are primarily (but not exclusively) white, middle-class, cisgender, and heterosexual. We do not have systematic data on the social class backgrounds of each participant, though the median household income for the school district where the middle and high schools are located was $61,863 in 2016, compared to $33,119 for the city as a whole.

The nine boys who identified other than White (one as African American, one as Asian, and seven as Latino) are distributed across all three age groups, both activity groups, and fall into each of the five analytical categories identified below. Our analysis mainly reflects the perspectives of white, middle-class boys because there are insufficient data to make racial or class distinctions. Table 1 summarizes these demographic characteristics.

Duckworth adopted Mandell's (1988) concept of a "least-adult" identity to solicit rich responses during interviews. In theory, a "least-adult" identity helps to diminish the asymmetrical balance of power between the participant and interviewer (Thorne 1993). Still, it is possible that some subjects may have censored their comments because of differences in status characteristics between them and the interviewer. She aimed to appear androgynous rather than gender queer or butch, which may have carried two advantages. First, boys may not have felt they needed to prove their masculinity as much as they may have felt if a cisgender man or

woman conducted the interview. Second, the young men may not have viewed the interviewer as someone to impress or as a target of "desire," allowing for more candid responses.

Like most interview-based research, we elicited narratives from recall of events, rather than a verifiably accurate recounting of events or a snapshot of events unfolding in real time. The data show what boys say and what they say they do, which is not necessarily what they actually do. However, these data are appropriate because we are interested in boys' narratives of masculinity and the stories they tell about how they respond to peer pressure. We edited participants' statements to show their pronunciation patterns and to remove some (but not all) filler words and phrases such as "umm," "like," and "you know." All names in the manuscript are pseudonyms.

We open-coded each transcript, followed by multiple rounds of focused coding organized around larger emerging themes. We then applied a finalized coding scheme to all interviews (Ryan and Bernard 2010). In the next section, we describe the different definitions of masculinity that the boys and young men had, along with how well they believed they were meeting those goals, before relating those to peer pressure about sexuality. The typology presented here emerged from the data and actually contradicts original assumptions of how boys would identify. Initially, we expected the contrast between the two groups to be relatively well-defined, with athletes subscribing to traditionally masculine ideals and musicians expressing more alternative notions. Instead, the data showed a contrast between subjects who believed they were reaching their personal gender goals of masculinity and those who perceived themselves to be failing to do so, regardless of age or activity group. We rely on boys' perceptions of their successes and failures rather than imposing our own evaluations of how well they do or do not live up to their stated goals.

Gender Goals and Defining Masculinity

Regardless of age, these mostly white middle-class athletes and musicians could describe society's preferences for young men (who look like them) to embody hegemonic masculinity, even if standards were in opposition to their own beliefs. When asked what it means to be a man, the boys' responses generally describe white American masculinity. For example, Jack, a 14-year-old HS baseball player, explained that to be a man, "You have to be mature, make the right choices, be strong, be tough, and do what you gotta do." Blake, 18 years old and in HS band, stated, "I

mean, there are all those stereotype things. You gotta be a jock . . . a lot of people wanna have that tone, like a muscle body. You got to look out for other people. Like you just can't leave everybody behind. You kinda have to sometimes carry them with you."

However, while the boys recognized dominant ideas about hegemonic masculinity, many said they themselves do not aspire to these ideals, having different, "hybrid" ideas about what defines a "real man." Boys also varied in the extent to which they felt they measured up to their personal definitions. What results is a five-category typology, shown in Table 2. Boys who viewed themselves as successful in reaching their masculinity goals are the Alphas and Outcasts, achieving hegemonic and hybrid masculinities, respectively. Alphas in Pursuit and Closeted Outcasts believed they fail to attain their ideals of masculinity.

The boys in the fifth category, typically from middle school, altogether rejected the traditional gender hierarchy privileging masculinity over femininity. Although these attitudes may change once they enter high school and college (as it is unknown whether this is an age, period, or cohort effect), we named this group Pockets of Potential, revealing a set of ideals that may be possible for the next generation of young adults. These boys talked about manhood as being a good *person* rather than a good *man*. They saw little difference in expectations for themselves compared to girls, and desired to construct masculinity as similar to what "girls should do." They did not speak in terms of "masculinity" or "femininity," or differences between boys and girls. For example, MS musician Joseph, 13 years old, said, "Pretty much whatever a guy can do a girl can do too. I don't feel anything special." James, an HS band member, 14 years old, explained, "I don't really see men too much different from women. To me, people are pretty much just people." We introduce this

TABLE 2: Typology of Masculinity Achievement

Meets Goals?	*Accepts the Traditional Gender Hierarchy*		*Rejects Traditional Gender Hierarchy*
	Hegemonic Masculinity	Hybrid Masculinity	
Yes	Alphas n=16	Outcasts n=30	
No	Alphas in Pursuit n=21	Closeted Outcasts n=11	
			Pockets of Potential n=9

group because we want to show the full range of how participants in our study talked about masculinity. We do not fully analyze this group here, focusing instead on the other four more elaborated categories of boys with clear ideas about what masculinity means to them and whether or not they have reached their gender goals. In addition, the small sample size makes it difficult to say anything definitive, a point to which we return in the conclusion.

Alphas and outcasts. Some participants described their desire to embody attributes of hegemonic masculinity and believed they are successful in attaining that ideal. We refer to this group as the Alphas. Boys of all ages, both musicians and athletes, fall into this category. They largely viewed themselves as popular in their particular schools, said they do not feel pressured to conform to anyone else's standards, and did not feel the need to engage in any particular kind of behavior in order to "prove" themselves.

Alphas understood manhood as solidly within the bounds of traditional, hegemonic ideals of masculinity. Brad, a 20-year-old collegiate athlete, confidently and candidly discussed topics ranging from locker room banter among teammates to private conversations with his grandmother about concussions. Brad illustrates traditional views of masculinity in his explanation of what it means to be a man and the characteristics a man should possess:

> To be a man, my ideals would be, you gotta be tough at sometimes. . . . Men have to be a little more rough around the edges, they don't show as much emotion as women, they keep that to themselves. I think that men are normally the burden-bearers of families. If something goes wrong, they are the ones you confide in for the most part, and they are able to take it. They basically absorb it and push it down deep and they don't really show it off to anyone else. They don't really confide in family members or girlfriends or wives. You have to be brave and courageous, you have to be supportive of your kids, family, brother, sisters, anybody in your life. A man's support goes a long way. Definitely being brave or courageous and being able to chase after whatever it is, dreams or goals, being able to do that kind of stuff. I think showing others they can chase after it too, by being a leader is a big part. Being a leader and a burden-bearer are two big things that I would say men should be able to do.

Brad's explanation touches on each of Brannon's (1976) four tenets of masculinity. A man is not supposed to show emotion, "they keep that to

themselves." A man is supposed to be a big wheel, "being able to chase after whatever it is." A man is supposed to give 'em hell, "being brave or courageous." Lastly, a man is supposed to be a sturdy oak, "the burden-bearers of families."

The components of hegemonic masculinity were well understood—and embraced—among some boys at younger ages too. Josh, a 16-year-old HS athlete, said being a man means "being someone people look up to and having leadership and integrity, kind of like being the main person in a family. You have to be the authority figure." Evan, a 13-year-old MS musician, explained being a man means "being big and tough. You have to grow up to be strong and big." Alex, an 18-year-old HS baseball player, reiterated, saying, "Girls have more pressures, but guys have the ability to be tough and have muscles. All [guys] need to do is not act like a girl or be called, well, a bitch."

The largest category of boys articulated a desire to attain hybrid notions of masculinity and felt successful in reaching their gender goals. We call this group the Outcasts because several boys in this category referred to themselves as "outcasts" during interviews, not realizing that many peers shared similar ideas about masculinity. Lucas and Brian, both HS musicians, explicitly called themselves "outcasts" compared to how they see their peers. Baseball players echo this sentiment too. Brady and Colin, HS and college athletes respectively, believed their alternative view of masculinity made them "outcasts" among their teammates. The term "outcast" highlights the boys' own recognition of social positioning and social hierarchies when it comes to commonplace notions of masculinity, and their lack of awareness that many peers defined masculinity similarly.

Outcasts were successful in reaching their goals of an alternative masculinity. They viewed masculinity as forgoing some notions of hegemonic masculinity and including traditionally feminine qualities such as empathy, emotionality, and cooperation. Like Alphas, Outcasts did not feel pressured to be different from who they are. John, a 14-year-old HS musician, stated, "I think a man should be very caring toward the people they love but also have some backbone in them so they can stick up for themselves, but not be too aggressive. He can't be getting into fights. You have to enjoy and love the people that you are with." John referenced being emotionally open, a traditionally feminine quality, while maintaining "some backbone," and continuously articulated a balance between masculine and feminine attributes throughout his interview. He said men have to be able to assert themselves in service of protecting others but cannot be too aggressive or fight. He included emotional openness with a more traditional idea of masculinity.

Refinement of one's ideas about masculinity may occur as boys age into young adulthood. Like any other opinion or ideal, ideas about masculinity shift over time with life experiences and events shaping more developed thoughts. Dave, a 20-year-old Outcast and collegiate athlete, described such an evolution:

> Growing up I was very close minded . . . be a man means you're strong, take care of yourself, take care of your children, take care of your wife. Now we go out in the real world and all men are different. I don't think I'm any more of a man than somebody who is in the band or does dance. I have plenty of friends who are like that too and into the arts and we consider them still men. I don't think that's a trait that's very common amongst my other teammates though.

Both Alphas and Outcasts felt they were successful in attaining their desired sense of masculinity, exuding confidence and satisfaction that comes along with being able to articulate, and then embody (at least in the sense of talking about what they do) their gender goals.

Alphas in pursuit and closeted outcasts. A smaller subset of boys talked about failing to attain their desired sense of masculinity. Those wishing to attain hegemonic masculinity but who believed they are failing are Alphas in Pursuit. They upheld the importance and power of hegemonic masculinity, but articulated shortcomings in their pursuit of this goal. Closeted Outcasts aimed for an alternative ideal of masculinity, but felt pressure from family to conform to traditional masculinity.

Alphas in Pursuit viewed masculinity traditionally, encompassing physical prowess, dominance, and suppressed emotions. Matt, in HS and 18 years old, articulates some of these points, after mentioning earlier in his interview his frustration with having a relatively short stature compared to his peers:

> A man, in my eyes, he's gotta be masculine. He's gotta be the head of the family, in charge of things. Everything relies on a man. Um, not saying, there's nothing wrong with women, but men are generally more stronger, just physically better at things. . . . Men are generally better at most things. So being a man, it's kinda like, you want to be a leader. . . . Most likely everything falls on you.

These comments show a broader dominance of men over women in Matt's eyes, a world where "men are generally better at most things." Underpinning

Matt's comments is the desire to be in control of people and situations, but while simultaneously failing, in his own eyes, to have all the needed attributes to do that.

While boys across all groups noted a range of physical characteristics that men should embody, Alphas in Pursuit mentioned physical attributes more often and in greater detail compared to others, usually when talking about their own shortcomings. For example, Louis, a HS athlete, tapped his chest and said that a man "should have hair on his chest." The link between bodies and masculinity (Flores 2016), especially shortcomings, are well known to boys starting at young ages, sometimes relating to the onset of puberty.

Twelve-year-old Thomas was the youngest to articulate feeling inadequate in his masculinity. A MS musician, Thomas explained his desire for traditional masculinity but did not see himself reaching those goals. He stated:

> My doctor always tells me that I am very under height and I am very underweight of most men my age. Also, a lot of people say like whenever I am at a swimming pool a lot of people ask me if my parents starve me as a joke. You can really see my rib cage. I eat a lot. I work out a lot. I try to gain muscle and weight and I can't really gain height but I try to work out a lot so I can finally meet up to expectations of me to be a man.

Thomas further explained activities he does to compensate for his height and weight, saying, "I am still classified as a boy. I wish I could be called a man for once. Like just to be able to do something that could get me as a man. I am shooting guns, riding four-wheelers, yeah, that's pretty manly I guess. But that still doesn't really classify me as a man." Thomas struggled with not being classified as a man, though he may see himself that way, as he compared himself to "most *men* my age" (emphasis added). At 12, he viewed masculinity as being big and tough. His sporty activities are part of his attempt to be seen as a "real man," even if his body has not quite caught up yet.

Similar feelings of inadequacy are prevalent throughout Alphas in Pursuit statements, regardless of age. Returning to Matt's comments, he explained his own masculine shortcomings by talking about his current employment situation in contrast to his father's upbringing:

> I've been out of a job for a couple weeks . . . and it's been really like, making me feel down about myself that I can't find a job. . . . But that's really what's making me feel like less of a man . . . not being able to work. My

> dad has had a job his whole life. He juggled school, baseball, a job, any sports or anything like that. I feel like if I don't have a job, I'm not providing for myself and I'm not supporting myself. So, I feel like I need to rely on others to help me and I feel like that's not being a man, that's asking for help. I make big comparisons, like to me compared to some of my teammates, I'm smaller, I'm not built, I'm not huge. But then again, I look at others that are more deprived than I am and I feel bad for those people because that's being less of a man.

Matt thought a man's ability to support himself financially is a key marker of masculinity, along with the physical ideals of masculinity. By remarking on his positioning compared to other young men his age, he recognized—and legitimized—the hierarchy of men and masculinities.

Alphas in Pursuit generally felt aggrieved by their perceived failure to attain the trappings of traditional hegemonic masculinity, viewing themselves as smaller, weaker—"less of a man"—than peers. They also described pressures to "man up" and become more "macho." To mitigate this pressure, Alphas in Pursuit felt they must prove their masculinity and manhood through demonstrations of physical strength, toughness, or sexual prowess.

In contrast, Closeted Outcasts aspired to achieve a masculinity that includes elements of cooperation, care toward others, and gender egalitarianism, but failed to reach that goal. They described being able to embody alternative notions of masculinity around their friends, but faced pressures from their parents, coaches, or other authority figures to adhere to more traditional masculine norms.

Bill, a 16-year-old HS musician, described his goals of masculinity: "I just think that being a man is to be supportive of others. You have to be kind and nice to everyone and well, I'm helping other people with schoolwork and helping them learn their music. . . . I just am always there for people when they need it." Throughout the interview, he reiterated the need for men to show their feelings toward others and said he tries to exemplify this around his girlfriend and male peers. However, his parents and teachers sometimes try to stifle his emotions:

> At a graduation ceremony for our elementary school we couldn't stop crying 'cos we actually liked that place. So I was crying and then, my [male] teacher just came up and said, "Act like a man." So I just like, stopped crying for a little bit and then it just came back again when we had to leave afterwards. Then my parents told me the same thing. I just took it to mean like, stop crying. And I don't know why they said that, it's okay to cry.

Bill felt caught between two sets of expectations. On the one hand, he wants to exemplify more alternative notions of masculinity around his friends and girlfriend. On the other, he struggles to maintain a more traditional masculine image around adults.

Nathan, a fellow HS band member, echoed the struggle of being able to act one way around his girlfriend but then feeling limited in his expression around his friends:

> Sometimes I feel like every guy I talk to, nobody wants to be in a relationship. . . . None of them are looking for it, where I have been in a relationship for two years and I am so happy. I'm glad I am in a relationship and a lot of guys are afraid even if they're in a relationship to actually show emotions, that they care. They are afraid people will make fun of them if they post something on social media, then people joke around with them about it.

When asked for clarification, he responded, "Like a picture of them two and be like, 'Oh we love you,' a stupid thing like that. Sometimes that will be brought up between guys, especially if you do it often. I feel like guys are afraid to do that. I am really not. I just do my own thing. I show that I care . . . I make sure she feels important. I feel like a lot of guys don't do that." Nathan described being caught between two sets of expectations much like Bill. This type of predicament left Closeted Outcasts to perform traditional masculinity around one group of people and then switch to their preferred masculinity around those with whom they felt more comfortable.

Closeted Outcasts were very aware of generational disconnects in ideals of masculinity. Vance, a collegiate athlete, said a man is:

> Someone that can support themselves. Someone that's responsible. Acts in a kind way to others and has polite manners. My dad always used to say, "Be a man, don't be a bitch about anything. Man up to it. Act professional." It's kind of a tough one though. I don't really think you need to man up to it all. [*8-second pause, then whispers*] "Be a man" . . . it's a tough one.

Yet Vance directly illustrated the inconsistency between his own ideals of masculinity and what he is taught by his father. He expressed difficulty in being able to have open conversations with his teammates about emotional topics such as death or breakups. He explained that he was taught a man "pushes it down and deals with it on his own, alone" in reference to his heartbreak and sadness during these events. So while many Closeted

Outcasts faced pressures from older authority figures who tell them to "suck it up," "man up," and "stop whining," they also said they feel pressure from their friends. However, those pressures seem to be more the result of boys assuming that is how their friends would think or react, perhaps falsely believing they are the only ones to not embody or want hegemonic masculinity.

Boys in all groups were well aware of the expectations of traditional masculinity, and had a sense of whether they had attained it. One of its main components is compulsory heterosexuality. What, if any, are the influences of peer pressure on sexual relations for those who believe they meet (or fail to meet) one's own definition of desired masculinity? How do differently categorized boys navigate these pressures?

SEXUAL PRESSURES AND NEGOTIATIONS

Half of participants (52 percent) described feeling an omnipresent pressure to engage in sexual activity, saying this pressure came from parents and family, friends and teammates, and media. Matt, age 18, said this pressure is "always there. It's like swimming in it." A teammate elaborated, describing how hitting on girls makes him more of man in the eyes of others. Ron stated:

> I feel like it's more intense when you're with other guys. Like, you're trying to impress them. . . . In a sense, it's not about getting the girl. It's not like you're looking for a relationship. But most guys, when you're at parties, it's more like to impress others. Like, prove your masculinity by expressing high amounts of testosterone.

Matt and Ron, both Alphas in Pursuit, generally felt that to fully accomplish masculinity they should be having sex. The idea that much of the performance of masculinity is actually done for other boys confirms the connection between sexual experience and masculinity (Duncan 2012; Kimmel 2008; Pascoe 2007).

While sexual peer pressure was most acute among HS students in our sample, even middle-schoolers felt and contributed to this pressure. For example, Evan, a 13-year-old musician said that he and his friends like to joke about "virginity," saying things to each other like, "Hey Richie, you have a lot of pimples, but at least they'll go away, unlike your virginity." Evan said that anyone in his group can become the butt of the joke at any time, contributing to that overall feeling, similar to that described by Matt

and Ron, of a constant awareness coming from peers about one's sexual performance (or lack thereof).

The pressure to be masculine by having sex does not just come from peers. Boys mentioned that fathers also contribute to that pressure. Jeffrey, a 15-year-old athlete and Alpha in Pursuit, described a conversation he had with his father: "My dad sits me down the night before my first day . . . of high school, and goes, 'You're a man and you're expected to start having sex with girls now that you're in high school.'" Though most participants did not describe paternal pressures as being quite this explicit in connecting sexual experience with masculinity, they did note pressures and expectations from their fathers, grandfathers, and other older men in their lives.

The pressure to engage in some level of sexual activity was largely accepted and unchallenged among half of the boys in this study. However, some talked about feeling a disconnect between their own and their friends' or parents' ideas regarding sexual activity and its connection to their gender goal. Boys employed various strategies to negotiate the pressures to conform to masculinity norms of heterosexual performance in their everyday lives. Their actions fell into three broad categories: avoiding or deflecting; tacit acceptance; and outright rejection. None said they had actually confronted peers who were pressuring them.

Avoidance and Deflection

Avoidance is a strategy typically deployed by Alphas and Outcasts in response to conversations about sexual activity. In an effort to deflect attention away from sex or away from them, these boys would often joke about another boy or use humor to shift the conversation.

When asked if he feels any pressure from his peers or adults to engage in or talk about sexual behavior, Benjamin, an Outcast musician says, "Not really, but we're in high school and all my guy friends want to talk about is sex. They talk about it all the time and I'll just sit there, you know? But usually I'll bring up Jon . . . he hasn't yet so I know if I start talking about him then they stop with me." Benjamin noted the pressure he feels in the frequency of conversations about sex. He tried to avoid the topic, not by alienating and confronting his peers about being uncomfortable, but by "just sitting there" or deflecting the attention to another boy. This deflection might have an additional consequence of creating or adding to pressure felt by others; he implicitly contributes to the peer pressure by deflecting that attention onto someone else.

Cole, a 13-year-old MS Alpha and baseball player, used similar tactics to deflect attention during conversations involving girls. He stated, "Yeah, the guys talk. I try to pick on my friend who hasn't even had a girlfriend yet. . . . Then we talk about that." Both he and Benjamin used other boys to shield their anxiety around the topic of sex and to avoid unwanted scrutiny from their peers. In doing so, they contributed to the overall pressure among peers to have sex and prove their heterosexuality.

Boys used strategies of avoidance at every age group in this study. All the college baseball players told stories about locker room conversations, where, by far, the most discussed topic was sexual encounters with women. Most insisted they did not discuss their own girlfriends, rather they discussed weekend "hookups," or casual encounters. Brad explained how he negotiated the peer pressure to discuss his sexual experiences by largely avoiding their attention:

> I've had a girlfriend for about two years and some guys will mention her to try to get a rise out of me. They ask us if I have yet or not but I won't talk about it because I respect her, you know? I don't want them to know that stuff so when they start . . . I usually make a dig at one of them who has no comeback. Like, "Why? You don't even have a girl yet, so who are you getting ready for?"

Brad, an Alpha, was secure in his relationship and protective of the privacy of his experiences with his girlfriend. But to avoid unwanted attention and pressure, he directed the conversation toward other teammates, similar to Cole and Benjamin. Becoming the aggressor enabled Brad to avoid attention himself. This move was perhaps made even easier since his two-year relationship made it relatively safe that others assume he's conforming to compulsory heterosexuality. Boys who used techniques of avoidance did not necessarily start as the aggressor, but used deflection in response to perceived pressure in conversations with sexual remarks.

Alphas and Outcasts who deflected were the only boys to use techniques of avoidance. This is related to their security in attaining the gender goal of their desired masculinity. They responded to peer pressure not by rejecting it, but rather by shifting the attention to another boy who is lower on the social hierarchy and therefore an easier target. By doing this, these boys do not challenge the influences of peer pressure and tacitly legitimize them, sometimes even directly pressuring others.

Acceptance

Boys in our sample generally recognized the importance of engaging sexually with women to achieve a desired masculinity. Responses that

accept or normalize these expectations displayed a strategy to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative outcomes by outwardly communicating a notion of "it's not that bad," coinciding with Agnew's (1992) argument about cognitive responses to strain. Some of the Outcasts, Closeted Outcasts, and Alphas in Pursuit normalized the peer pressure surrounding sex. They talked about these pressures as unsurprising and ordinary, and often followed their comments with a shrug.

Most of the boys who largely accepted peer pressure about sex as normal and routine also struggled with feelings of inadequacy and failure. Dean, a Closeted Outcast, expressed his frustration with his high school experience and his excitement for the transition to college. Regarding the peer pressure he faces, he said, "I'm not [sexually active] but some friends talk about it a lot. I don't want to yet, but they're always talking about it. I guess that pressure is just there. . . . Not much I can do about it. It's just always there. I feel like I am not fulfilling something. I don't really know what it is. It is just something else I cannot do right." This HS musician felt persistent pressure to engage in sexual encounters but also powerless to really change those expectations. By doing nothing, he implicitly normalized and adds to the legitimacy of the pressure.

Other boys accepted the pressure in more passive ways. Matt understood pressure to have heterosexual relationships as something everyone must deal with, the "water they must swim through." Another Alpha in Pursuit, Louis, described the environment as "just the way it is here. My teammates are joking about it in the locker room and in the halls and it's just what it is . . . it's just there, you know? I just deal with it." Louis accepted the status quo and did not feel as if he is in a position to confront or change it. Other participants, too, explained their peers' expectations to engage in sexual encounters as normal, just the way it is. In doing so, the boys tacitly normalized the generalized pressure among their peers despite not directly pressuring friends or acquaintances themselves.

Rejection

Boys who rejected sexual peer pressure are in all five categories of masculinity achievement. They framed their reasoning around avoidance of risky sexual behaviors to limit negative consequences on future successes. Both musicians and athletes explained that fathering a child or contracting a sexually transmitted infection would be "drama" that could interfere with their professional aspirations.

Some college athletes hoped to be drafted into Major League baseball. Beck, a 20-year-old Alpha, was very focused on his draft prospects and

unwilling to let anything derail those hopes. When talking about possible heterosexual relationships, he said, "Nah, it's not that I don't want it. . . . I just don't want a kid right now. I can't. . . . There's too much other shit to worry about. A kid or an STD would mess up a lot for me right now. My buddies all brag about the girls they brought home over the weekend, but I don't jump in. I just look at them like they're nuts." Dave, a fellow teammate, had a similar reason for rejecting the pressure around him: "I do my own thing. My friends swap stories about hooking up and all that. But I can't get caught up in drama, and getting a girl pregnant would be drama." Dave is an Outcast and has different views on masculinity compared to Beck, but both rejected the peer pressure around them for similar reasons. Pregnancy or STIs would be "drama," putting their dreams at risk, and something neither was willing to risk.

Outright rejection of peer pressure also happened among high-schoolers. Austin, a 15-year-old Outcast and musician, was steadfast in his rejection of peer pressure to use drugs, alcohol, or engage sexually with girls. He explained, "I feel like there's pressure going around. Like, people just try things 'cos their friends want to. But I'm not into that stuff and if I don't want to do that, my mind is set. . . . I think I make the right choices for the stuff that I do. I don't focus on the peer pressure." Austin rejected the peer pressure all around him and chose not to focus on it.

Some boys who rejected normative traditionally masculine expectations about heterosexual encounters insisted they "did their own thing" or would only have sexual encounters within exclusive relationships. They understood that their actions could have negative consequences and, therefore, they took extra precautions to avoid risky behaviors. Some middle-schoolers, especially those in the Pockets of Potential category, recognized the pressure to date and engage in sexual behavior, but rejected the pressure for now, knowing that they have the rest of their lives for that. As 12-year-old musician Paul said, "I don't plan on dating any time soon. . . . I don't know, I'll worry about that later. I want to be a kid now."

Boys who rejected these pressures have potential to interrupt the cyclical nature of peer pressure. This is in contrast to the boys who avoided or accepted the pressure and either passed the pressure to another boy or internalized the pressure. Boys who rejected the peer pressure offered a strategy to challenge or dismantle peer pressure in ways that have the potential to undermine norms of hegemonic masculinities, as they sought to attain gender goals in a more varied masculinities landscape. However, none explicitly stated or told stories where they confronted their friends and refused to accept the pressure. By not telling their friends they are at

the very least uncomfortable, or actively challenging peer pressure, the connection between heterosexuality and masculinity remains strong.

CONCLUSION

Boys in this study articulated their goals of masculinity and how they viewed themselves measuring up to those standards. Consistent with previous literature, we initially assumed athletes would idealize hegemonic masculinity, while musicians would be more open to alternative masculinities. However, we found these distinctions between types of group peer activities to be largely irrelevant among the young men in this sample. Some athletes aspired to achieve alternative masculinities while others adhered to hegemonic masculine gender ideals, and the same is true for musicians. If typical peer-group activities like band and baseball are no longer sorting mechanisms for types of masculinities, we must take a look at the speed of change in the broader social world, suggesting that some of the pioneering studies may be less useful for understanding masculinities today. By taking into account individual goals for masculine gender performance and whether boys believed themselves to be successful in attaining those goals, our typology adds nuance to demonstrating how both hegemonic and hybrid masculinities support the prevailing gender order.

Two obvious limitations of our study are related to the lack of diversity in the sample and the small N, which precludes more refined analysis. First, there may class- and race-based differences in masculinity ideals and how successful boys and men at different ages are in achieving them, but we cannot determine that from this largely white, middle-class sample. Second, although not thoroughly analyzed in this manuscript due to small sample size, the fifth category of "Pockets of Potential" provides an example of the rejection of current hierarchical gender relations. As we argue elsewhere (Duckworth 2018), this may be evidence of continued progress toward more egalitarian gender relations.

We have three main suggestions for future research. First, longitudinal analysis would help researchers better understand if and how boys' and young men's goals of masculinity shift over the life course. The analytic categories we found are likely dynamic and boys may move in and out of them as they age or encounter changing social norms. For example, some Closeted Outcasts may move into the Outcasts group once they establish themselves in college and achieve more independence or experience less

pressure from generational elders. Or, the idea of "outcasts," of not fitting the mainstream, might drop altogether as broader gender norms continue to evolve. A specific example where longitudinal analysis would be particularly useful would be in understanding whether different ideas about masculinity held by the Pockets of Potential are due to life course effects, or whether they are in a transitional state. Do their views represent new—and enduring—views about what masculinity is and can be?

Second, our analytic strategy could be extended to study the influence of female peers of the boys in terms of their gender goals, which could be especially useful since the heteronormativity of hegemonic masculinity demands cross-gender social relationships. A study that includes girls would elucidate how boys' gender goals and self-conceptions develop in relationship to significant others and alongside girls similarly pursuing their own gender goals, rather than only in relation to other men or broader cultural goals, as we have done here.

Third, future studies should aim to capture masculinity ideals across a variety of racial and social class groups, since the absence of much diversity in our sample underscores one of the main limitations of this research. As other scholars have noted, African American, Latino, Asian, and other racial minority men, as well as wealthy and working-class men and intersections in between, may construct masculinity using different markers of success or failure compared to the markers of middle-class white masculinity from which these boys drew (Flores 2016; Wingfield 2013).

Strategies of peer pressure negotiation these boys used generally uphold the pillars of hegemonic masculinity. Larger cultural forces are acted out on an individual level as "manhood acts" in the lives of young men as they negotiate their first few sexual encounters and come to see girls and women as either status symbols to be commodified and acquired or as equal partners. Some of our subjects talked about women as objects or tools to achieve masculinity, while a considerable number did not. However, neither do the boys generally question or interrupt the conversations they witness other boys having. They embraced the idea that masculinity should not be so narrowly defined, yet still acquiesced to the benefits of masculinity's social privileges.

Thus, the important progress that feminists have made in changing many boys' mindsets about girls and women has yet to overcome the challenge of speaking and standing up to others, of interrogating and dismantling privilege and oppression. This thereby reinforces a system of sexism without sexists, not unlike a society of "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva 2006). On a practical level, our findings provide evidence to support

teaching bystander intervention techniques in schools and athletic spaces. For instance, coaches and school administrators can target student-athlete and band programs that deal with sexual education. They can develop leadership programs that help students recognize problematic behaviors or rhetoric that demeans women, minimizes sexual assault, or treats women as commodities to be attained to magnify male privilege. This, in turn, could lead to boys challenging their peers when conversations not only pressure them to have sex but also objectify or degrade women—especially if those boys can come to understand that they are not, in fact, "outcasts" but represent the majority of a new generation of boys and young men.

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