"DOING BOY" IN MALE PEER GROUPS:
A DISCURSIVE APPROACH INTO ADOLESCENT
MASCULINITY

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Abstract: Gender- and identity-based literature acknowledges gender as performative, and gender identities as emerging through both discursive and materialistic actions. Within this framework, masculinity is viewed as constructed in various and multiple forms. Drawing on these concepts, this study aims to highlight versions of masculinity that emerge through adolescent boys' views about their participation in male peer groups. Boys' accounts negotiate the socially prevalent discursive resources regarding what it means to be and act as a member of a male peer group. Data were drawn from 10 boy-consisted focus groups, held in the school setting and conducted on the basis of a semi-structured interview protocol. The analytic method was discursive, based on the assumption that language is a means through which one constructs identity positions and understandings of the world. Analyses revealed the persistence of hegemonic ideals about maleness and indicate the significant role of the male peer group in the making of masculinity. Implications of this kind of research are discussed.

Key words: Masculinity, Interpretative repertoires, Peer group.

INTRODUCTION

Research on masculinity is a relatively new field in academia developed mainly during the 1990s. It emerged primarily due to the impact of feminism, which questioned the conceptualization of maleness as *the norm* and claimed masculinity is a *gendered category* (Kimmel, 2000). Gender is an appealing concept to theorists of mainstream psychology who try to elucidate the kind of factors that determine it and understand how gender differences emerge and develop. In general, traditional psychological theories conceptualize gender as a basic, fixed individual characteristic that affects

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the ways one views oneself and the world and which shapes, to a significant extent, their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and behavior (Connell, 1995).

Traditional theories introduced the term *gender identity*, a concept believed to be of great significance for human development, since it largely determines how people view themselves and provides an important basis for their interactions with others. More specifically, gender identity refers to how people make sense of their self and subjective experience, that is, what it means to be, feel, think and act as a man or a woman (Cole & Cole, 2002).

The various psychological theories of gender identity proposed a number of different factors that impact it. Biological, social, cognitive and psychoanalytic factors have been proposed as critical for the formation and development of gender identity (for a review of the most prominent psychological theories regarding gender identity formation see Αθανασιάδου, 2002). However, these theoretical viewpoints were subjected to severe criticism, originating mainly from feminist thought. The objections voiced centered on two points. The first regarded the uniform understanding of gender: that is, men and women were seen as inherently different and as holders of specific physical, emotional and psychological characteristics that are both universal and stable (Butler, 1990; Davies, 1989). The second objection concerned the implicit favoritism of the masculine identity, as the traditional theories equated "man" with "human" and the normal, while they reserved a rather subordinate position for the feminine identity (Gilligan, 1982; Walkerdine, 1981).

The growing impact of feminist thought, combined with the distinction between *sex* and *gender* that was introduced by Ann Oakley in 1974, initiated a shift in the academic discourse on gender which now focused on its social determinants. New theoretical approaches were thus developed under the influence of feminist, sociological, and philosophical ideas, notably post-structuralism (Francis, 2001).

This recent theorization questions the uniformity and stability of gender identity and endorses the idea of gender as a more permeable and changing concept. The focus now is not placed on the individual but on interpersonal relations and social institutions. This new theoretical perspective supports the notion that gender identities are shaped through the multiplicity of interpersonal interactions which take place in the various social settings (Αθανασιάδου & Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή, 2010). Gender is, therefore, not an inherent or a given characteristic that a person possesses. On the contrary, one has to constantly perform one's gender in various settings and environments. In other words, gender is understood as both stable and fluid (Butler, 1990).

Current views on masculinity

In the new theoretical frameworks "manhood" became gendered and questionable (Flax, 1990). This conjecture led to a variety of debates and theorizations aiming to enhance the understandings on men and masculinities. The acknowledgement that masculinity and femininity are not antithetical, but emerge in relation to each other, made the study of men essential for a better and more thorough understanding of the ways gender identities are formed (Francis, 1998).

As a result, masculinity became a central aspect of identity research and issues about men's power and men's position in gender relations received great attention (Connell, 1995). The major changes that occurred in modern Western societies during the last decades of the 20th century, combined with the changes in traditional gender roles they brought about (Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή & Σακκά, 2005), played a significant role in making men, their characteristics and their doings a highly debatable issue (West, 1994).

However, not all approaches in masculinity research rely on the same theoretical background. In general one can distinguish two broad approaches: the *celebratory* approach -according to which men are victims who suffer from the current changes and transformations in gender relations and need to restore their previous status- and the *critical* one, which recognizes that masculinity is a social construct that may take different forms and depends on the context one finds oneself in (Gough, 1998).

The first approach is based on the rejection and denigration of feminist ideas. It supports essentialist beliefs, according to which inter-sex differences are believed to be natural and unquestionable. Furthermore, it promotes the idea of men being in danger because of the advent of feminist ideas. These ideas are mainly developed by the supporters of *men's movements,* which aim to defend maleness and help men overcome this current crisis (for a detailed presentation and classification of these movements see Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Messner, 1997).

The critical approach, on the other hand, is primarily based on the feminist and post-structuralist theorizations about gender and identity. In this theoretical framework masculinity is conceptualized as multi-faceted characteristic, constantly evolving and never fully achieved (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994). It is, therefore, conceptualized as a social construction (Nilan, 2000) which is constructed in different ways, across different contexts, time periods and through various discursive practices (Edley & Wetherell, 1997).

In addition, masculinity is treated as a hierarchically organized characteristic with some of its aspects dominating over others. At various levels (local, regional and global) certain forms of masculinity are more socially acceptable and powerful than

others, both intergroup and intragroup (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Research has indicated, for example, that white men's masculinities are usually more privileged than black men's, and physical ability is highly valued and admired among adolescent boys whereas signs of physical weakness are disvalued (Connell, 1995; O' Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). Connell (1995) introduced the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* as a constantly evolving aspect which is culturally and historically dependent. More precisely, hegemonic masculinity refers to "the dominant and dominating forms of masculinity which claim the highest status [in social settings] and exercise the greatest influence and authority ... and depict the standard bearer of what it means to be a 'real' man or boy" (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997, pp. 119-120).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity proved to be a useful theoretical tool that enabled a more thorough understanding of both masculine identities and gender relations. First of all it inspired a great number of studies that revealed how -at our socio-historical period- hegemonic versions are being formed, enacted, and organized around specific characteristics such as toughness and hardness, heterosexuality and homophobia (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; Mac an Ghaill, 1996). Furthermore, the idea that there are specific forms of masculinity that are more powerful than others was instrumental for revealing the power relations within which masculinity operates and making visible other aspects of it, which may be marginalized, denigrated or simply at risk (Connell, 1995; Paechter, 1998). Non-hegemonic forms of masculinity are usually formed through the interplay of gender with factors, such as race, class, ability, sexual orientation, etc. Marginalized forms of masculinity, such as the masculinities of disabled men, are deprived of power and privileges and are, most of the time, derogated (Gerschink & Miller, 1994).

In general, the understanding of masculine identities as performative acts (Butler, 1990) that are constructed in various ways through both everyday talk (Edley & Wetherell, 1997) and embodied actions (Kehily, 2001) made their study a core issue in gender identity bibliography. Relevant research has turned its focus onto a number of social institutions and settings such as the family (Coltrane, 2001), the school (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1996), the working environment (Connell, 1998), the mass media (Craig, 1992) and sports (Edley & Wetherell, 1997) in order to highlight the variety of masculinities negotiated and constructed in these contexts.

The male peer group

Much of the empirical work on masculinity focuses on how participation in peer groups and embracement of their informal cultures affect the construction of mas-

culine identities (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Frosh et al., 2002; O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000; Paechter, 2007). Particular emphasis has been placed on the impact of peer groups that are formed during adolescence because they are believed to constitute - along with the family and school- important social settings that co-construct one's identity (Kehily, 2001). Being part of the group, feeling included and integrated seem to be crucial for adolescents, who try to adjust their styles and behaviors to those proposed and supported by the group(s) they wish to belong to (Renold, 2005). Through identification with the group's norms, styles and values one validates one's membership and enhances one's sense of belonging and well-being (Willott & Griffin, 1997).

On the other hand, the peer group strongly affects the ways adolescent boys and girls perceive themselves as gendered subjects (Paechter, 2007; Pascoe, 2007). Connell (2000) suggests that it is "peer groups, not individuals the bearers of gender definitions" (p. 162), since they constitute an ideal setting for enacting and engaging with gendered identities. It should be noted, however, that one is not free to construct any kind of gender identity one wishes. On the contrary, peer groups promote specific standards and set the boundaries of acceptable male and female identities (O' Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). As a result, being included is synonymous to conforming to specific styles, language, attitudes and beliefs that characterize a *normal girl* or boy (Renold, 2006).

In so far as boys are concerned, the power of the male peer group is particularly important, because it acts as a type of context that promotes versions of gendered selves that comply with the socially prevailing versions of masculinity (Frosh et al., 2002; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). These masculinity versions usually involve active engagement in hegemonic heterosexual identities and relations (Renold, 2006). Specifically, "practices of heterosexuality, homophobia, athleticism, economic privilege, toughness, and violence provide pathways toward achieving and/or maintaining status as the hegemonic masculine norm in adolescence." (Phillips, 2005, p. 219). Each boy, thus, ought to perform masculinity in ways that abide by the hegemonic norms and the heterosexual imperative. In any other case one puts oneself at risk of exclusion, as peer groups control and monitor their members and punish those who deviate from the norms they set. Boys who "conform to dominant heterosexual codes of masculinity" (Kehily & Nayak, 1997, p. 70) enjoy the privilege of being on the top of the group's hierarchy, while those who do not fully obey to the set norms are marginalized. Adolescent boys who fail to fit the accepted forms of masculinity are treated as outsiders, as others who cannot claim membership in the peer group. The most usual *othering practices* involve harassing, both verbal and physical (Martino, 1997). Consequently, male groups appear as highly competitive settings (Valentine, 2000) and being a member is not always an easy

or pleasant experience, as there is the fear and angst of ostracism, of being labeled as *different* and being rejected (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). In fact, feelings of self-doubt and lack of self-confidence are often reported (Warrington & Younger, 2011).

The present study

Research on gender identities in Greece is a new field, as gender issues remain beyond the focus of mainstream academic research. Historically, much of the relevant research focused on the interrelations of gender and the educational process (for a review see Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή, 2007). As regards masculinity, current research in the Greek context (see for example Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή & Σακκά, 2005) aims at revealing the content of masculine identities, while the constructive aspects of boys' speech are, still, understudied. It is, therefore, difficult for studiers of masculinity, to gain insight into the everyday life and the various experiences of a boy, particularly the ways he chooses to *do* boy and construct aspects of a gendered self (Arnot, 2002).

The present study adopted the theoretical framework of gender identities, which highlights the active and performative nature of gender identities (Αθανασιάδου & Δεληγιάννη-Κουϊμτζή, 2010). This theorization is inspired by the feminist ideas and conceptualizations that view boys as social agents who negotiate and perform a multiplicity of gendered identities (Mac an Ghaill, 1996), while drawing on specific, socially available interpretative repertoires about masculinity (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Interpretative repertoires are understood "as linguistic phenomena which have coherence in terms of their content and style and which may be organized around one or more central metaphors" (Lyons & Coyle, 2007, p. 101). In such a context, language and its features play an important role in the understanding of the formation of gender identities, as through it one constantly occupies diverse identity positions and makes sense of the world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Based on this theoretical stance, the study aimed to examine the formation and *doing* of youth masculinities. More specifically, its scope was to explore the multiple ways boys use language to construct gender and to adopt specific subject positions while talking about their activities and experiences as members of same-sex peer groups.

The analysis of the data had a triple scope: a) to identify the interpretative repertoires on which boys based their discursive constructions and to gain insight into their action orientations (that is, understand the function of these repertoires); b) to identify the linguistic features used and displayed in order for multiple subject positions -and the identities they imply- to be formed, and c) to reveal possible influences of societal factors on the formation of these repertoires.

In sum, the study attempted to combine the micro-level focus on the text and the macro-level understanding of the impact that social structures have on the construction of masculinity and gain a better understanding of both the multiplicities, the continuities and the changes that characterize the process of the formation of gendered identities (Dillabough, 2001). The prediction was that hegemonic forms of masculinity will be present among Greek adolescent boys along with other forms of masculinity that are specific to particular groups.

METHOD

Design

For the collection of the data focus groups were conducted, a choice that seemed most appropriate since the objective was to investigate the performative and interactional aspects of masculinities (Taylor, 2001). Besides, focus groups are believed to provide a more natural setting, in which participants hold an active role, argue, defend their own theses and degrade those of others (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Participants

In total 60 adolescent boys participated in the study. Ten focus groups of boys were formed. Four to six boys, aged 14-16 years old, participated in each of them. All of the participants were students in junior high schools that were situated in different regions of the prefecture of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece. Specifically, 29 boys attended urban schools, 19 of them were students in schools situated in semi-urban areas whereas 12 of them were students in rural schools.

The homogeneity in terms of gender and age was intended to reveal gender performances of a representative, as far as possible, sample (ten Have, 1999 in Taylor, 2001, p. 24). Of course, the collected data cannot be considered representative of the whole population of Greek boys. The aim was rather to analyze and highlight the variety of practices male members of a specific age sub-group follow in order to do gender (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and, specifically, adolescent boys who are near the end of mandatory education.

Procedure and interview

All meetings of the focus groups took place in their school setting, since this is the

place where adolescents spend most of their daytime, interact with peers, form groups and collect experiences (Connell, 1996; Skelton, 1996). Permission to access schools was granted by the Greek Pedagogical Institute and school principals. The researcher informed all the male students of 9th grade about the study and its purposes and asked for volunteers. The study was introduced as a discussion about "their personal views, experiences and beliefs about what a boy in their age does, how he feels and thinks".

Focus groups were conducted during the academic year 2008-2009. Participants, due to the fact that were underage, were asked to provide a written consent by their guardians. Discussions were based on a semi-structured interview protocol which was created for the study's purposes and which revolved around what it means to be a boy. Questions included issues about boys' hobbies and preferences, the activities undertaken in the school and with peers, etc. Example questions were: "What does a boy your age enjoy doing the most?", "Do all boys have the same preferences?", "Boys and girls share the same or different interests?", "What kind of activities do you undertake when you are with other boys?" etc. The questions served as initiators and facilitators of discussion about their everyday experiences and the multiple ways they use to perform masculinity (Frosh et al., 2002). Participants held an active role and discussions evolved mainly as a result of their argumentations and remarks.

Analyses

All discussions were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher, a practice suggested by relevant bibliography as necessary for familiarization with the collected data (Rapley, 2007). The transcribed texts were thoroughly read in order to track the recurring themes that appeared in participants' speech and identify the interpretative repertoires upon which they drew in order to discursively position themselves. This process sometimes appeared as cyclic, since there was a continuous back and forth in the texts in order to identify the repertoires used and properly categorize the various extracts (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

The next phase involved the selection of specific extracts that clearly represented and explicitly described the identified repertoires. These extracts were then more thoroughly re-transcribed, according to a short version of the Jeffersonian system, proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987).

This detailed transcription aimed to facilitate the process of identifying the function of the participants' accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), especially the rhetoric and other features that enabled speakers to position themselves in specific ways and pursue specific goals regarding the construction of masculine identities. The discur-

sive analytic procedure reached an end after many repetitive readings of the extracts. The final stage of the analysis involved the linking of the findings with current socio-cultural reality and tracking its impact on the accounts produced by the focus groups (Hollway, 1995).

At this point an important note that needs to be made regards the analytic procedure and the role of gender issues in it. Since this study was inspired by feminist standpoints and ideas, gender was viewed as a central organizing principle, always present in every interaction (Kitzinger, 2000). In other words, in this study the accounts produced were conceived as entailing the participants' understandings of themselves as males. Besides, as mentioned above, the participants were informed from the beginning that masculinity was the central theme of the study, a fact which possibly prompted them to enter the discussions bearing in mind their gendered identities.

Since the original data were in Greek, the extracts used for the purposes of this article were translated into English. This proved a very delicate issue, as one had to minimize the possibility of item bias (Brislin, 1980) and avoid problems that could interfere with data analysis because of poor or inappropriate wording, inaccurate articulations or alterations in the meaning and the content of the text. It was, therefore, necessary that the translated extracts remained linguistically close to the original ones (Berkarovitc 1980). This was achieved through an independent back translation (Brislin, 1980), a widely recommended technique (Geisinger, 1994), according to which the chosen extracts were translated from Greek into English and then back into Greek by another, independent translator.

RESULTS

The emerged interpretative repertoires

The data analysis data revealed that the participants formed their accounts while utilizing features coming from two recurring interpretative repertoires. These repertoires appeared in almost all discussions. The first repertoire gives prominence to the *macho aspects* of masculinity and is constructed around popular laddish traits and behaviors that are traditionally presented as pure indicators of the *true* masculinity (Head, 1999).

The second repertoire relies on *sophisticated aspects* of masculinity as it highlights qualities associated with the 'rational' male (Paechter, 2001). Despite the fact that at first glance these two repertoires may appear antithetical, in fact they rather com-

plement each other, as both seem to be organized around notions of male power and hegemony. For this reason, the author claims that they can be subsumed into a wider interpretative repertoire, the *hegemonic repertoire of masculinity*. This repertoire, in fact, comprises of socially powerful and acceptable forms of doing the boy that rely on essentialist notions about genders and their characteristics and frame masculinity within the context of a constant demonstration of power, both in an actual as well as in a symbolic way (Frosh et al., 2002; Kehily, 2001; Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997).

   In the extracts following these two repertoires will be presented and discussed in ways that highlight both their content as well as how they are used in order to create specific versions of masculine identities.

The macho aspect of masculinity

Care-free boys who are having fun

The first extract comes from a discussion held in a high school situated in a semi-urban area near the city of Thessaloniki. The discussion revolved around the formation and the activities of a male peer group. The participants were previously asked to describe the activities of an adolescent boy in their age and all of them provided accounts organized around the engagement in specific athletic activities, namely football and basketball, listening to specific music styles, such as rock music, as well as computer-based activities. These activities are regarded as primary and typical signifiers of the 'real' man and are directly linked to dominant forms of maleness (Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davison, 2003; Frosh et al., 2002; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Paechter, 2007). The interviewer then asked what kind of activities they usually undertake while with male peers (See Appendix A for a description of the symbols used in the transcription)[1].

Extract 1a

1. Harry: [we do] *everything*
2. Kostas: we go for a walk::
3. Gregory: anything you could imagine
4. Notis: we talk (.) we play football (.)
5. Kostas: from [playing] football . to doing <u>nonsense</u> [

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[1] It should be noted that all the names of the participants are fictional, in order to avoid possible identifications.

6. Notis: <u>jerky</u> things. to talk:: (.) to speak
7.   correctly. this is one of our favorite. activities   (laughs awkwardly)
8. Interv.:   Tell me a jerky thing you may have done . for example:: =
9. Kostas: = we go and peeve [
10. Harry: <u>everything</u>
11. Gregory: we go and peeve (.) shall we talk about it? (addressing to Kostas)
12. Kostas: There is a (.) [
13. Notis: we buy a . we buy a phone card from a kiosk . man. An
14.   irrelevant phone number (.) and then we make a random call and we start
15.   shouting (.) in the middle of (.) like that. Out of nothing =
16. Gregory: =we fancy it

A first interesting point raised from this extract is the presentations of the boys' peer groups as loci of freedom, where any kind of activity can be enacted and accepted. This is achieved through the use of an extreme case formulation in lines 1 and 3 (Pomeratz, 1986). This rhetorical device points to the vast possibilities a boy group can offer and, consequently, presents this group as a place free of restrictions. The care-free nature of the peer group is repeated in line 5, along with another feature, the liberty offered to boys to engage in meaningless activities. Being free to act at will and with no restrictions is usually a common theme appearing in the popular constructions of maleness that sustains and valorizes the 'cool' character of modern masculinities (Francis, 1999; Frosh et al., 2002).

However, the intervention of Notis (line 6) suggests an alternative viewing of the boys' activities, as he refers to them not as "nonsense" but as "jerky things". The latter is a term usually associated with marginal actions, which do not abide by the social and/or moral rules. It is also part of the slang vocabulary used within adolescent peer groups and can be used in a complementary manner for someone who ignores the rules and the possible consequences of an action (also see Francis, 1999). In fact, carelessness is often described as a primary macho quality (Head, 1999; Frosh et al., 2002; O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000). However, this term can also be used reprovingly, as a means to renounce similar actions.

This is a rather ambiguous positioning, since the use of this specific term could be interpreted either way and Notis does not elaborate further nor does he clarify whether he approves or disapproves the "jerky things" boys do. In addition, while he uses the first person plural in order to claim membership in similar activities, he ends his account with an awkward laugh, which could probably be a sign of non-compliance. Notis seems in ambivalence, as he avoids taking a clear position in a possible

attempt not to displease his peers or the interviewer, who is an adult and who may not show understanding or approval of similar actions.

The interviewer's intervention in line 8, invites the participants to further elaborate on the issue. This request seems to act as a reassurance to the boys that they are not being judged, since Kostas and Harry immediately respond to it. However, Gregory still seems not at ease and he asks for permission to continue talking and making an outsider adult cognizant of their actions (line 11). This formulation is possibly a way to ensure that there will be no future blame or criticism by peers.

It is worth noting that the participants seem to recognize the controversial nature of some of their choices and for this reason they stand ambiguously towards them. It is possible that they intend both to align themselves with the peer group as well as avoid potential negative feedback from the audience.

Finally, another interesting point is the intervention of Notis in line 13, who interrupts Kostas in order to moderate the negative connotations and normalize the position of a boy who does 'jerky things'. While he previously tried to avoid taking a clear stance, now he eagerly talks about a joint 'jerky' activity and he claims full membership. This change could be due to a realization that the group context can sustain similar behaviours.

Summing up, in this extract all speakers choose to point to the freedom and the carelessness they enjoy within the peer group. As mentioned above these features are traditionally associated with the macho, laddish, aspects of masculinity. By calling on these features the participants succeed in positioning themselves as proper males who possess the proper characteristics of their gender (Francis, 1999; O' Donnell & Sharpe, 2000).

In this extract, and at this point of the discussion, the participants negotiate the troubled positions they raised with ease, and the identities they create become disposable for possible future needs (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996). It is, therefore, not strange that Gregory returns later to this specific theme. As the participants are talking about their leisure time, Gregory proceeds to the following account:

Extract 1b

17. Gregory: Err:: (.) When: (.) there's <u>here</u> this:: (.) wEll.(0.5) I DON'T like what
18.　　　　 we do. But:: (.) wEll. when there's <u>nothing</u> else to do:: (.) there's. a man.
19.　　　　 <u>there</u>. who lives in a shack:: (1) and:: (.) Drinks. and he gets <u>drunk</u> . and
20.　　　　 some guys go over there and <u>kid around</u>. We::ll . they <u>throw</u> rocks at him.
21.　　　　 and things like that. And he comes <u>out</u>. and he starts chasing them::
22. Harry:　 <u>Not</u> to harm him::
23. Notis:　 That's <u>Bad</u>

24. Interv: Hm::
25. Harry: Ye:ah
26. Gregory: Well:: (.) <u>that's</u> near my place. and I see. wEll. <u>what</u> this guy is
27.   gOing through. But:: (2)
28. Harry: Or. <u>Another</u> thing they do is (0.5) they walk on fOOt:: . they come and
29.   then go back. We come. We walk back. We co:::me . we go bAck.
30. Notis: But there's nothing else we can <u>do</u>
31. Gregory: During the <u>winter</u>. During the <u>winter</u>

In lines 17-21 Gregory brings back and claims for himself the familiar and already negotiated identity of a boy doing jerky things. However, the event he chooses to describe invokes a rather troubled position, as he is about to narrate a specific 'jerky' behavior for which he knows that he could later be criticized.

   The fact that he realizes the possible dangers his account may imply is evident since the beginning of his account; before even starting to describe the actual event he lists his justifications and excuses. The awkward position in which he is in and his confusion are also evident in the repetition of 'well', and the constant change of his point of reference; throughout his account, he keeps changing between the first person plural, the second singular and the third person plural, in a possible attempt not to clarify his own role. What is more, while he openly disclaims the described action, he also lists specific arguments in order to defend it.

   Firstly, he suggests that this is an activity imposed by the specific circumstances in which boys live in ("there is nothing else to do", line 18). Therefore, he suggests that this is not a matter of boys' *bad* personality, of their insensitivity or malevolence, but a situation imposed by external, environmental factors, which boys cannot control and for which, consequently, they cannot be blamed.

   He also argues on the playful nature of this activity, since boys are "kidding around" (line 20). It is all, then, about boys joking and having fun and not about boys willing to cause any harm. The position of a boy who wants to have fun seems to be an unproblematic one, and can be therefore used as an argument that stands up for this specific behavior. Furthermore, this reference to the playful nature of the described behavior, acts as a device that devalues the importance and the significance of such an action.

   However, his peers' openly negative responses (lines 22-23) make him alter his positioning. In his second turn of talk (lines 26-27) he tries to portray a more detached identity and he claims for himself the role of a witness, an observer and not of an active agent; he is just someone who witnesses some boys kidding around with one of his neighbors. In addition, in an attempt to defend himself and avoid the

potentially damaging identity of someone who is thoughtless and causes pain to anoth-er human being, he tries to create an empathetic identity. He explicitly expresses his sympathy and he states that he can "see what this man is going through" (line 27).

Interestingly, though, he does not explicitly renounce this activity; his account remains unfinished. With the use of the conjunctive "but" (line 27) he seems to sug-gest that there is possibly an alternative *reading* to the above mentioned behavior. In other words he still appears reluctant to fully disclaim such a practice, a fact that could be indicative of the significance that macho and laddish behaviors hold for boys.

Summing up, Gregory -although he can adopt a number of concrete and clear positions- chooses to carry along in the conversation the contradictory positioning of a boy who endorses and resists popular male behaviors at the same time. This choice of his could be due to the fact that he aims to gain membership in hegemonic fea-tures of masculinity and, at the same time, deflect any possible negative evaluations of his personality.

A last point worth noting is that both Harry and Notis, who at first made some negative comments, come in rescue at the end and "unproblematize" Gregory's posi-tion. Harry, in lines 28-29, diverts the conversation and refers to another male activ-ity, which verifies what Gregory has already pointed; boys really do not have much to do in their free time as they keep wandering up and down with no purpose. Likewise Notis, in line 30, repeats and stresses one of Gregory's arguments, that there is "nothing else to do". Both of these positions seem to work as an indirect acknowledgement and reassurance that that there is no personal blame put and that they understand why someone could engage in a behavior such as the one Gregory initially described. In other words, the group appears to sustain the notion of boys who want to have fun and act carelessly.

This is a notion which probably originates from popular images that view mas-culinity as a verification of men's hegemony. A claim to power involves violations and violence of all kinds (Hearn, 2004). In such a framework carelessness and having fun emerge as practices that go beyond the set limits and, therefore, assert male's power and dominance in public life. Furthermore, these behaviors constitute private, men-exclusive frames and act as male-bonding rituals that reinforce team spirit and cele-brate the prominence of the male body and one's own power (Connell, 1995).

Masculine traits as unique and distinct from the feminine

The second extract comes from a discussion group held with adolescents from an inner-city high school. As the discussion evolves, participants are asked to describe a boy and almost all of them highlight power as a basic male characteristic. Sotiris

claims that nowadays things have changed and gives an example of why he thinks so. He speaks of a man whose wife is the one who works and supports their family financially, while he is concerned with the housework. Sotiris talks about a "'not genuine and inauthentic man" and mocks him. As the discussion proceeds the focus turns on boys' activities and evolves as following:

Extract 2a

1. Interv.: So, when you are with other boys in groups (.) what do you usually do
2.   then? (2)
3. Thomas: We play basketball . football:: (.)
4. Sotiris: We talk [
5. Thomas: we talk about <u>girls</u>
6. Interv.:   you talk about stuff::
7. Stelios: Eh:: we <u>gossip</u>
8. Interv.:   You gossip about <u>what?</u>
9. Stelios: Eh:::: [
10. Sotiris: this is <u>females'</u> stuff
11. Stelios: What celebrities did::: (.) the doings of one::: of another::: (1)
12. Sotiris: Usually::: (1) about celebrities::: (1) athletes:: (.) football players (.) NOT
13.   just anyone . for example Vandi . or Vissi
14. Interv.: Hm::
15. Thomas: For <u>example</u>. about Gerald. Let's say::: (.)
                                    [.....]
16. Sotiris: We even. Sometimes we may fight with another group::: (.) or swear at
17.   each other . there. Just for fu::n . let's say:: =
18. Thomas: = Just for FUN (laughing)
19. Interv.: Hm:: . and when girls may join. what do you do then?(.)
20. Sotiris: we talk (1)
21. Stelios: Eh: (0.5) basically:: when we are with girls:: (.) we pretend . eh:: . (0.5)
22.   to be <u>romantic</u>
23. Sotiris: <u>NO::::</u>
24. Interv.: You pretend to be? =
25. Sotiris: = <u>No</u> (.) <u>NO</u> . HE:: [
26. Stelios: we are <u>showing off</u> =
27. Sotiris: = HE is the OnlY one who does THAT. Because he is a bit:: [
28. Thomas: "my girlfriend"
29.   (mocking)

30. Sotiris: JUST HIM . <u>there</u> . He does THIS
31. Interv.:   And. How can someone pretend to be romantic? (.) I mean . what does he
32.   do? How does he change? He changes his character? What:: =
33. Sotiris: <u>Yes</u>

                                    [...]

34. Stelios: he presents <u>himself</u> (.) as <u>very</u> innocent:: (.) very sensitive:: [
35. Thomas: "Shall we go
36.   for a drink" (mocking)
37. Stelios: Eh::: (.) he uses a somewhat NICER (.) eh. Vo .cabulary (.) That's IT.

The extract begins with a request from the interviewer to describe their activities within a boys' group. This request is met by Thomas and Sotiris, whose responses revolve around collective actions, socially ascribed as *masculine* (playing football and basketball, talking about girls, fighting and swearing). These are common and typical activities which are presented in a matter-of-fact way and which are not further elaborated.

However, Stelios's reference to gossiping (line 7) instantly mobilizes the interviewer who asks for further elaboration of the issue and for an explanation of the content of gossiping (line 8). This request seems to bring awkwardness since Stelios appears to be taken aback (line 9), while Sotiris briskly intervenes and curtly declares that this is "females' stuff" (line 10), namely an activity restricted to women. This clear positioning aims to prevent any mishearing and/or misinterpretation and solve the problem situation that had been created.

Stelios, in a possible attempt to clarify what he meant, claims that the boys' gossip revolves around celebrities and their doings (line 11). This statement does not solve the problem situation created. For this reason Sotiris re-intervenes and points out that the term "celebrities" refers to specific categories of people, namely athletes and football players, and not "just anyone". He seems to create two distinct categories: the first one includes those involved with sports while the other one 'just anyone'. The latter constitutes an extreme case formulation (Pomeratz, 1986) and serves as a device that strengthens the significance and the importance attached to the first category. His claim is supported by Thomas who gives a specific example of a famous English football player for whom boys may talk about (line 15).

It is probable that Sotiris's positioning seeks to elevate boys' gossiping into a worth noticing activity that fits the masculine values. For the male adolescent culture, gossip is an activity linked to femininity and, therefore, disregarded (Frosh et al., 2002). Stelios's account, which linked boys to an ascribed female activity, created

a problem situation that could threaten their identities. He, thus, creates a version of gossip that suits the male standards and interests and succeeds in normalizing the previously created problem situation.

However, later on, another question posed by the interviewer creates a new problem situation. In line 19 the interviewer invites the participants to describe the activities they undertake when they are with girls. Stelios responds and with some hesitation notices that this is a circumstance in which the boys "pretend to be romantic" (lines 21-22). In other words he suggests that the boys create some fake, non-genuine, versions of self while interacting with girls. Stelios is probably aware that his mention of romanticism, which is another characteristic attributed to femininity (Frosh et al., 2002), could potentially evoke negative reactions from the audience as well as cause doubts about his maleness. For this reason he explicitly presents romanticism as a fake characteristic for boys.

Nevertheless, his argument is met with instant reactions. Sotiris curtly refutes it (line 23), while the interviewer seems taken aback and asks for further clarifications (line 24).

An interesting point lies in the reaction of Sotiris, who repeatedly intervenes and tries to detach himself (lines 25, 27, 30) through the use of some extreme case formulations ("the only one", "just him") (Pomeratz, 1986). While Stelios talks in the first person plural and presents this as a practice that is part of the boys' repertories of action, Sotiris stresses that this is an isolated phenomenon, attributed exclusively to Stelios's personal practices. This way he both protects himself and the macho character of maleness.

Thomas, also positions himself in a similar way but he uses other means to do so: he mocks and, through the use of active voicing (Wooffitt, 1992), he ironically mimics the way one talks to a girl (lines 28-29 and 35-36). Irony is employed here as a means of dismissing the communication forms that appeal to girls. It is also possible, though, that irony can serve as an implicit articulation of a normative, macho-based subject positioning (also see Koborov, 2005).

Stelios seems to understand that he is in a troubled position and tries to reformulate. In lines 34 and 37 he explains that he refers to the ways one "presents himself" to girls. In particular, he talks about showing specific features in excess (see the repetition of the adverb 'very' in line 34 and the use of the comparative 'nicer' in line 37). In other words, it is a matter of degree and extent and not a matter of showing a fake version of oneself. Through this positioning he tries a) to minimize the danger of being blamed as not being authentic and b) avoid being seen as not masculine enough. In order to do so, he links -though indirectly- some excessive passive characteristics (sensitivity and innocence) to femininity, while masculinity is implied as a more restrained form of identity.

In this specific extract boys appear to form identities which are affected by macho, stereotypic ideas of masculinity and organized around the distinct nature of gender characteristics. These notions seem to be of great importance for the construction of masculine selves as indicated by the persistence to safeguard them and to separate them from femininity (see also Francis, 2001; Frosh et al., 2002). Bibliography suggests that one basic feature of the macho character of masculinity is the need to persevere gender distinction (Paechter, 2001). It is, therefore, suggested that the participants' accounts rest upon this imperative.

Sotiris and Thomas, in particular, point to this direction, while Stelios finds himself in a troubled position since he repeatedly refers to behaviors traditionally ascribed as feminine. In order to resolve it and avoid criticism, he tries to *masculinize* those behaviors in terms that fit the macho aspects of masculinity.

This need to preserve gender boundaries appears again later. Sotiris reintroduces it as the boys talk about the interactions held between boys and girls.

Extract 2b

38. Sotiris: Basically (.) we've reached a point <u>where::</u> (.) even if we:: (.) when girls
39.   are around:: . we DON'T wa. if we <u>want </u>to appear. like Stelios said. a bit
40.   more::: <u>reserved</u>. We CAN'T (.) because <u>girls</u> are becoming. little by little::
41.   (.) They <u>curse</u> too. in our group of friends girls talk a::s they please::: [
42. Aris: They
43.   DON'T let us take the initiative::
44. Sotiris: Generally speaking:: (.)
45. Interv: They DON'T let you . heh?
46. Sotiris: Generally:: I mean. OK. <u>These</u> days it happens <u>all the time</u> (.) in our <u>days</u>
47. Interv: Is that <u>good?</u> It it bad? Is it.. of <u>no difference?</u> WHAT is it? (1.5)
48. Sotiris.   Can I say?
49. Interv: Whatever you <u>want</u>
50. Aris: <u>Maybe</u> it's <u>bad</u>! Because .usually. the man is the one that <u>always</u> takes
51.   <u>initiative</u>. and now:: (.) now that things are <u>so messed up</u> (.) He CAN'T do
52.   <u>anything</u>

In lines 38-41 Sotiris reopens an issue that has already troubled them and positions himself in a somewhat different way. This time he does not openly dismiss Stelios's claim but he explains that boys cannot alter anything in their behaviors towards girls, because girls have crossed the gender lines and have adopted specific, macho, masculine behaviors (cursing, talking as they please). Therefore, boys are now unable (we CAN"T, line 40), to act as Stelios previously proposed.

Aris intervenes and adds another example of crossing the gender boundaries. He points at girls for not letting boys take initiatives, a role exclusively designated to men (see the use of the extreme case formulation, "always" in line 50). Accepting the interviewer's request to evaluate this phenomenon, Aris openly criticizes it ("it's bad", line 50) and supports his claim by noticing that this new reality has "messed things up" (line 51) and made gender limits no longer clear and distinct. As a result of this ambiguity and vagueness, boys are refrained from taking any action. Through this emphatic description of the vast degree to which men are affected, Aris implicitly puts men in the position of the victim and notes the significance of the fact that they are not free to perform their masculine identities.

The victimization of boys is further supported by the claim that the new social reality is to be blamed (see "in our days", line 46 and "now" in line 51). In other words external factors that extend beyond the boys' control create this generalized phenomenon that deprives them of their identities.

It seems that at this point of the discussion speakers face no troubled positions. They act complementarily in order to support the need for gender segregation and show the malfunction that is caused by the crossing of gender boundaries. In this case, the importance of the macho aspects of masculinity is implicitly negotiated. The participants' positioning seems to rest upon the implicit assumption that when boys are deprived of their macho characteristics, their identities are at risk.

Overall, the participants' positions and accounts could reflect a current popular idea, that of 'men in crisis'. This is a common belief, according to which true maleness, and especially the macho characteristics of masculinity, are in danger. Men are portrayed as no longer sure and confident about their role, particularly because modern Western societies adopt a more equal attitude towards both women and gay men, which were previously the subordinated 'others' (Taylor, 2006). Given the above, it is not surprising that popular mass media constantly rehearse men's problematic and awkward position, in education, in family life, in the workplace etc. In addition, the rise of a new type of man, the *metrosexual*[2], who endorses and incorporates in his male identity traits previously ascribed as feminine, causes great ambivalence to modern men who understand that masculine identities are on the move (Dowsett, 2006).

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[2] This is a term used to refer to successful, urban men interested in fashion, food, and lifestyle.

The sophisticated aspect of masculinity

In some points of the discussion, as in the focus groups evolved, the participants created accounts that highlighted features of masculinity which supported a sophisticated aspect. The boys linked maleness with qualities and practices associated to maturity, respect to moral values, trust, responsibility etc. This was particularly evident when participants were asked to describe themselves and their role in the peer groups or to talk about the criteria they set for other boys in order to accept them in the group.

 In the following extract boys from an urban school are asked to describe the qualities and characteristics a peer should possess in order to be accepted into the group. Makis, one of the main speakers, has previously recurred to a version of sophisticated masculinity since he has described himself as someone with his "own personality" and claimed that "it is indifferent to him whether one dislikes him". He has also noticed that "usually others try to keep up with me and do what I do". Later, while discussion revolved around the characteristics of a boy, he supported the idea that some of his peers have "a childish mind, they cannot broaden their horizons and understand that he can help them and advise them". Therefore, the sophisticated version of masculinity has already appeared as an available repertory to which boys can resort in order to discursively construct versions of themselves.

Extract 3

1. Nektarios: = We DON'T want guys::: who <u>smoke</u> (2) who <u>beat up</u> others (.) I
2.   would NOT wish. I D::ON'T:::. want <u>those</u>=
3. Takis: = who pretend to be <u>some ones</u>
4. Interv.: <u>In which</u> way could someone pretend [
5. Nektarios: Well. For example:::: (.) a lad=
6. Takis: = a lad
7. Nektarios: the lA::d::: of the group (.)
8. Interv.: What does a lAd do? =
9. Takis: = he <u>bullies</u>
10. Interv.: He bullies? He may hit others? Beat them up? Do::: (.) Do:: WHAT?
11. Takis: Eh::: (.) to::: (.) to::: <u>show off</u> (0.5)
12. Makis: Basically when I am in a <u>group</u>:: (.) when someone enters our group
13.   (0.5) in particular (.) I begin. I see that:: (0.5) let's say I <u>like</u> him (.) we
14.   do::: the same:: (.) we have the same interests. We hang out. together we
15.   do:: (0.5) <u>I talk</u> with the <u>older</u> ones. of the group (.) we say whether they

16.   <u>like</u> him too:::(.) we try to make <u>him</u> a member too (.)If they DON'T like
17.   him we say <u>the reason</u>:: why:: (.) <u>we ta:lk:::</u> (.)
18. Simos: <u>exactly</u> (.)
19. Makis: Yep. right:::(.) Usually (.) whoever::: (.) eh::: (1) DISagrees:::(.) with <u>the</u>
20.   <u>things</u> we do. or he <u>shows off</u>(.) or tries to show somEthing:: (0.5) we
21.   are::: (.) we DON'T have. We <u>CAN'T</u> show any <u>trust</u>::: (.) we DON'T
22.   <u>even</u> let him in.
23. Interv: You mean that there are <u>many</u> boys who show off? <u>many</u>. boys at your
24.   age that may be bullies?=
25. Nektarios: = Hmmmm::::: (.) TOO many
26. Makis: Generally speaking (.) they CAN'T find anything to hold on to (.) and
27.   they try to <u>show</u> (.) through the use of <u>other</u> means (.) them<u>selves</u>.

Nektarios and Takis in a series of turn taking start enumerating criteria for being
accepted in the peer group. Instead of talking about the desired qualities of a peer,
they choose to point out their antithesis to specific practices and personality traits.
They, thus, refer to specific characteristics that are not desirable, namely practices,
such as smoking, beating others up (line 1), pretending to be someone else (line 3)
and bullying (line 9).

Nectarios's account is of particular interest. The emphatic negation he employs
seems to serve a double purpose: on the one hand it sets a distinct limit to the behav-
iors a group might accept, while on the other hand it helps him distance himself from
the specific practices described (see the multiple emphases in lines 1-2, i.e. "We
DON'T want", "I would NOT wish", "I D::ON'T::. want <u>those</u>").

Another interesting feature is the fact that he speaks both on account of others
as well as for himself. He initiates his speech by using a pronoun of the first person
plural, possibly willing to legitimize his claim and make clear that this is a limit set
with the consent of the group. Having achieved that, he proceeds with the use of a
pronoun of the first person singular, in order to mark his own antithesis. He charac-
teristically puts the bearers of such behaviors on an opposite side (see the use of the
pronoun "those" and the emphasis he puts, in line 2) and succeeds in underlining the
distance that exists between himself and "those" boys.

Both speakers indicate that boys are not passive recipients but rather actively
engage in the evaluation of their peers' behaviors and choices and judge them
accordingly. Consequently, maturity and critical thinking are implicitly portrayed as
features that a boy should possess.

At this point Makis intervenes and elaborates on the issues raised. His speech is
well organized and seems to constitute an attempt to evince the mature facet of mas-

culinity. He initiates his argument by noting that a possible rejection of a peer is not an impulsive or a vindictive act. It is rather a common decision which is based on that person's behavior, emerges through group discussion and requires the consensus of all the group members (lines 12-17).

He presents peer groups as a democratic setting where boys are free to express personal opinions and are taken into account. In such a context decisions come as a result of consensus and agreement. His argument is empowered by the use of a three-part list (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) (lines 19-20), which clearly states that rejecting a peer comes when "he disagrees with us", "shows off" and "tries to show something". This way the weight of a possible group rejection lies within the person himself, whose choices and behaviors make him unreliable and undesirable. The use of the auxiliary verb "can't" (line 21) stresses that fact that such behaviors leave no alternative than rejection. The emphatic repetition in lines 21-22 serves towards the same direction ("we DON'T have", "We CAN'T", "we DON'T even let him in").

Another interesting characteristic is the choice of the verb "let in" (line 22) which puts the peer group in the position of the leader, who sets the rules and is, therefore, the true bearer of power. However, this power stems from collectivity, as the use of the personal pronoun in the first person plural suggests.

In this extract Makis, like Nektarios and Takis before him, positions himself in a certain way in order to achieve specific goals. A first goal is to avoid possible unsympathetic hearings that could hold him accountable for rejecting peers. All speakers try to point out they are neither eclectic nor eccentric when deciding whether a peer should enter the group, but that the fault lies within the person himself.

A second goal seems to be the intention to highlight features such as rationality and maturity and claim them as their own. This is evident in the ways the participants construct their argumentation as well as in the ways they choose to respond to the interviewer's questions and interventions. More specifically, the interviewer seems to anticipate a more thorough elaboration of the issues raised and therefore either invites the participants to further specify the nature of the described behaviors or proposes specific frameworks for consideration (lines 10 and lines 23-24).

However, the speakers do not provide detailed descriptions but rather choose to evaluate and suggest specific causes concerning the phenomena they describe (lines 11 and 26-27). This positioning creates an indirect comparison between them and the *bullies* and designates them as rational and emotionally secure beings, who have the ability to act and think in mature, witty ways. On the contrary, bullies are portrayed as emotionally insecure and lacking self-confidence.

Summing up, it is believed that at this point of the discussion participants created accounts and positioned themselves in ways that underscore their maturity. This

seems to be a common, and untroubled, position that all speakers claim for them-selves. While boys appear to also have a macho repertory available, as references to lads and their characteristics indicate, they choose to distance themselves from it. Despite the fact that traditional hegemonic forms of masculinity are associated with laddish behaviors (Frosh et al., 2002; O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000), the participants in this group appear to adopt specific rhetoric strategies in order to oppose themselves to the *lads*, to whom they attribute adverse characteristics (lines 9 and 11).

However, this does not mean that they disclaim male hegemony. On the contrary, they step on traditional notions which have their roots in the Enlightenment and link the male hegemony with traits such as rationality, lucidity and sophistication (Paechter, 2001). The versions of sophisticated masculinity that they activate may not endorse physical power, yet relies on mental power and superiority. According to rel-evant research findings a current, and quite popular, version of hegemony that mod-ern societies seem to support is based on the display of rationality, intellectuality, self-efficiency and responsibility (Francis, 1999; Kehily, 2001).

In other words, the boys manage both to differentiate themselves from other peers and at the same time remain loyal to the hegemonic ideals. Besides, creating a distance from popular hegemonic features (such as strength and power) is believed to be a rhetoric tactic one uses in order to position oneself in the top of male hier-archy (Wetherell & Edley, 1999).

It is also worth noting that boys use sophisticated versions of masculinity to con-struct their own identities, when faced with the need to compare themselves to oth-ers. Accordingly, the presence of an adult and, most importantly, a female inter-viewer could also be a matter of significance that demanded the participants' atten-tion, in order to avoid being labeled as immature and thoughtless (Koborov & Bamberg, 2004). The participants' will to create sophisticated versions of masculini-ty could be an attempt to ensure a positive self-presentation before the interviewer, without dissociating themselves from the hegemonic ideal.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of selected extracts revealed a variety of repertoires-in both the content, the rhetorical forms used and the discursive positions adopted by boys. The partici-pants discussed the activities and rules of a male peer group and tried to delineate what participation in a boy group is about.

First of all, one should note that the boys negotiated a number of subject posi-tions, both troubled and untroubled ones, which were, of course, situated to the spe-

cific local contexts. It is worth pointing out that at these particular settings the participants' troubled positions emerged from different needs and goals. In the first extract, for example, the troubled positions highlighted were about the boys' need to assert their possession of specific features of masculinity without being negatively judged -either by peers or by the adult interviewer. Despite the fact that, at some points, their positioning raised some moral issues, the need to construct versions of selves that supported specified masculine traits was rather evident. On the other hand, in the second extract the participants' troubled positions emerged from a possible pressure to preserve the confirmed gender boundaries that distinguish boys and girls as two distinct categories. On the contrary, in the third extract there were no troubled positions as boys seemed united in order to achieve a specific goal: to construct versions of themselves in opposition to other boys.

The various positions described and analyzed seemed to draw on specific repertoires available to the adolescents who took part in this survey. A first repertoire revolves around the *macho* aspects of maleness and marks features traditionally ascribed to men, such as adventure-seeking, carelessness and power (also see Frosh et al., 2002; Paechter, 1998). Furthermore, this macho repertoire also includes the notion of adhering to gender roles and boundaries. Boys seemed focused on safeguarding masculinity and its characteristics and on maintaining gender boundaries (O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000; Paechter, 1998).

A second repertoire activated gave prominence to maturity and sophisticated behaviors. Many of the accounts were based on traits such as maturity and rationalism and formed part of sophisticated masculine identities that celebrate rationality, objectivity and maturity.

These two repertoires were activated in different parts of the discussions. The boys resorted to the macho repertoire when asked to describe their experiences and activities in the peer group or when asked to define a boy and its characteristics. However, when asked to describe the criteria they set for letting a peer join their group of friends or describe themselves as boys, they chose to highlight some sophisticated aspects of masculinity.

This is a realization that reaffirms the highly contextual nature of a discursive analytic procedure and calls for a thorough look into every aspect of it, including the content of the questions posed, their meanings, even the ways these questions are formulated (Hollstein & Gubrium, 2004). Under this perspective it could be claimed that boys resort to macho aspects of masculinity when asked to provide general accounts of their doings and their traits. However, when faced with the task to provide accounts at a more personal level and compare themselves to other boys, they may resort to more sophisticated versions.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that, at a first glance, these two repertoires seem antithetical and incompatible, they both rely on notions of male power and hegemony and support traditional notions about genders. Even in those cases that sophisticated aspects of masculinity were put forward, the hegemonic ideal was not dismissed. Therefore, it could be claimed that both of these repertoires can act as sub-repertoires that fit under a broader one that supports a hegemonic notion of masculinity. The participants seemed to lean on socially available discursive resources which supported hegemonic ways of *doing* the boy (also see Frosh et al., 2002) in order to construct distinct and safe identities that do not threaten their place in the gender order (Edley, 2001).

The persistence in the hegemonic ideal could be an indicator of the consistency that characterizes the conceptualization of masculinity. Despite the social changes that took place during the second half of the 20th century, traditional conceptions of the *proper* male continue to define the construction of masculinity (Francis, 2000). Current research on masculinity describes similar hegemonic-oriented versions as dominant in Western societies and affirms the rigidity that characterizes the construction and organization of masculinities (see for example Francis, 2000; Frosh et al., 2002; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; O'Donnell & Sharpe, 2000).

However, it is also possible that the participants turned to these specific repertories because of the nature of the analytic procedure followed in this study. Adolescents were asked to discuss gender identities within a group of peers and in front of an adult, female interviewer. These circumstances might have urged them to entrench behind traditional versions of masculinity. Given that peer groups can become competitive settings, where boys have to prove themselves and fight for a decent position in the hierarchy of masculinities, the adoption of specific subject positions and the presentation of certain theses seems possible (Francis, 2000; Holland, Ramazanoglu, & Sharpe, 1993).

As the analysis revealed, the participants approached matters of gender with some cautiousness, since they appeared unwilling to consent to ambiguous versions of masculinity. In fact, they utilized a number of rhetorical features and positioned themselves in diverse ways in order to avoid any possible negative evaluations and/or counter arguments.

A further element that should be taken into consideration involves the ways in which participants accepted and reacted to the interviewer, a female adult. Despite the constant reassurances that they were free to express any view or opinion they wished and that there were no right or wrong answers, these two main identities of the interviewer immediately rendered her an outsider. Consequently, the boys' need to present acceptable versions of themselves and their choice to draw on sophisticated aspects of masculinity could also be due to the interviewer's presence.

Overall, the presentation of these specific theses does not necessarily signify that the participants actually endorsed similar hegemonic practices in their real life. Neither does it imply that they created fake versions of masculine identities just for the purposes of the focus groups. On the contrary, since gender identities are dynamic processes and are constantly evolving (Butler, 1990), one has the choice to construct a number of varying gender identities and position oneself in context- and time-related ways that serve specific needs as the above mentioned (Pattman, Frosh, & Phoenix, 2005).

Summing up, the findings of the present study add to the current bibliography on masculinities, as they provide useful information regarding the ways adolescent boys negotiate and perform masculinity while participating in male peer groups. The analytic procedure revealed that boys do not constitute a homogeneous group defined biologically and characterized by uniformity. On the contrary, there are multiple ways of defining oneself as male and performing masculinity and each boy constructs those versions of masculinity that help him achieve specific goals and gains both personally and socially (Frank et al., 2003). Finally, the context-related nature of gender identities highlighted in this study is a finding that may also have practical implications in real life. Professionals who work with adolescents and seek to gain a better insight into matters related to boys' interactions and gender performances could indeed make use and benefit from such an insight.

APPENDIX A: Transcription notation (drawn by Potter & Wetherell, 1987)

[a marker of overlap between utterances.

=   at the end of a speaker's utterance and at the start of the next utterance. indicates the absence of a discernible gap.

(.)   indicates a pause which is noticeable but too short to measure.

(3.5)   numbers in brackets indicate pauses timed to the nearest tenth of a second.

:   one or more colons indicate an extension of the preceding vowel sound.

.   a full stop before a word or sound indicates an audible intake of breath.

( )   round brackets indicate that material in them is either inaudible or there is doubt about its accuracy.

[ ]   square brackets indicate that some transcript has been deliberately omitted. Material in square brackets is clarificatory information.

Underlining indicates that words are uttered with added emphasis; words in capitals are uttered louder that the surrounding talk.

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