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Bromance and Hookup Culture: A Study in the Performance of Masculinity by College Men

Cover Page Footnote

Anna-Sophie Poost is a graduate of Elmira College with a degree in Sociology / Anthropology. This paper was first presented at the 2017 Pi Gamma Mu Triennial Convention.

Bromance and Hookup Culture: A Study in the Performance of Masculinity by College Men

College is the most opportune time for the development of young adults, most likely due to the population's similar age ranges, shared spaces, interests, and priorities. It is during this time that people find their passions, plan for their futures, and build friendships. It is a time when people believe they will find themselves. Sociologists argue that individuals do not find themselves, but instead learn to define and perform a role based on societal standards and pressures. While there are many different elements that go into a person's role, gender is one identifier that plays a large part in our society.

College is a prime space to develop gender performance as the atmosphere lends itself to testing the limits of gender roles by identifying what behaviors are socially acceptable. In the last decade, certain cultural trends and norms have taken root. Some generational norms, which previously may have been perceived as calling into question a man's sexual nature, or homoerotic, have come to be more acceptable. One such prominent practice is "bromance," which this study examines to understand its intricacies and part in performative masculinity. This paper argues that in order to maintain gender norms and the societal understanding of masculinity, homoerotic or feminine exercises, such as bromances, must be offset by compensatory hypermasculinity or clearly heterosexual masculine behaviors, such as partaking in hookup culture. Both halves are important due to the cultural understanding of masculinity and the widely accepted theory of gender fluidity and performance, and as such these norms are making a rise. Using analysis of previous research that explores the different factors at play, such as confidence, social settings, and boundaries, and data collected during comprehensive

interviews with members of the population, the paper explores underlying behaviors and reactions of college-aged men that exemplify such trends.

The culture of cisgender, straight, man's man heteromascularity surrounding these two cultural trends are heavily dependent on an over exaggeration of performed actions as well as a balance of habits that fall on the scale of homosexual in appearance and hypermascularity. The one side of this scale includes behaviors that could be perceived as homoerotic, or sexually charged, specifically with someone from the same sex. This homoeroticism exists in bromances in a joking manner, and in moving far beyond the limits of social acceptability for homosexuals it is considered acceptable for heteromascularity individuals. In the off chance that this could be mistaken, it is offset by hypermascularity, or exaggerated male behaviors. These actions can act in a reparative manner, as often times they will occur in tandem with perceived homoerotic behavior, as such it is considered compensatory hypermascularity.

Theory: Goffman's Dramaturgy

Performativity in regards to social roles was first born as an element of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy, which is a part of the theoretical school of symbolic interactionism. In his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman presents this theory, which is built on the idea that every public action or reaction is a choice that an individual makes to appear a certain way.¹ The theory claims that each person is an actor, life is their stage, and those they interact with are their audience or observers. Each person maintains control over how they act and consequently, how they are perceived.

Within each controlled interaction, the actor works on a spectrum between two distinct approaches. On one end, is the 'sincere actor,' who believes in the truth that he shares with his audience, "We find that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely

convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality.”² For this performer, their actions seem so close to their understanding of reality, that even they are fooled into believing their acting is the truth. Moreover, oftentimes the observer will believe the performance, thus convincing both actor and audience. Upon this occasion, the only one left believing this to be a false reality is the sociologist themselves.³ Due to the genuineness with which this interaction takes places, this individual is called the ‘sincere performer.’

The opposing end of the spectrum is the ‘cynical actor,’ who by Goffman’s definition, “May not be taken in at all by his own routine.”⁴ As is often said, we are our own worst critic, and in this vein of understanding, it becomes more difficult to believe themselves to be acting fully truthfully when someone knows the full extent of the truth. When people are performing in such a manner, they will often come to the point where they understand their ability to bend perceptions and as such may feel inclined to do so in order to reach a wanted result. The cynicism for which this side of the spectrum is named, refers to the very end of the spectrum at which point the actor, is fully aware of his lie and does not care whether his audience even believes him or not.⁵ Despite the negative connotation that comes with this description, it can be offset with the idea, as presented by Goffman, that, “a cynical individual may delude his audience for what he considers to be their own good, or for the good of the community...”⁶ At times giving false convictions to one’s observers may seem necessary as it provides them with a more positive experience in that interaction. For this reason, it becomes clear that both types of performance have positive and negative reasoning to support them.

Goffman’s theory of ‘front stage’ complexifies our understanding of ‘performance.’ This sub theory gives depth to ‘performance’ by explaining not only where the actors perform but also the perceptions of the audience for each fixed setting. Goffman notes that ‘Front Stage’ is a

specific part of Dramaturgy that explains when and how an individual chooses to play their part when there is the possibility of continuous interaction with the audience.⁷ Goffman's theory examines the many parts of the 'Front,' which includes 'Setting,' 'Manner,' and 'Appearance.'

The setting, which is the location or situation in which the actor performs, provides a clear framework for a person's performance. The setting within the front stage acknowledges that an individual's performance is not complete, and as such not correct, without taking place in the proper environment. By building this environment the setting gives distinct beginnings and ends: "Those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it."⁸ The setting is the overarching term to explain the restrictions of a performer that act both preventatively and precursory. For example, this study and the interactions discussed in it are set against a college campus setting, more specifically the social life that occurs within the college climate.

While acting on the 'front stage,' there are specific qualities that are coupled with a performance. Goffman notes 'manner and 'appearance.' The 'manner' element of Dramaturgy describes how a person chooses to comport themselves and address an interaction based on what they are presented with before entering the scenario, alternatively appearance specifically dictates social standings.⁹ The different variables that are found in any given interaction mold how a performer will react due to what they expect to be dealing with and the outcome they are seeking.

It should be noted that Goffman also discusses the role each person plays as an observer. When acting as the audience, we expect that we can take what others are showing us at face value. Goffman states, "When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to

take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess.”¹⁰ Overtime, observers may come to realize the duality to this ‘truth.’ With experience, people learn as the audience to be more aware of what they see and question the factuality of what is presented to them. As such, their doubt guides their actions as an audience member. Goffman argues that, “So common is this social doubt that observers often give special attention to features of the performance that cannot be readily manipulated.”¹¹ It is only after interacting that the observer will decide whether or not to trust the actions of the actor. Experience as an observer and the awareness that comes with it helps to form a ‘generality.’ This concept contends that those who have seen enough relatively similar performances are able to compartmentalize said performances and use their experiences to respond accordingly.¹² In so doing, they can then limit the mental capacity taken up by reactionary measures and still manage a myriad of situations.¹³ Generality is Goffman’s interpretation of what many in psychology would term as ‘schema.’ Eventually with experience, both the performer and the audience come to understand and experience both sides of performances—genuine and distrustful.

Gender Performativity Theory

Performance seems to be an element of just about every aspect of society, and gender is no different. Traditional gender theorists, such as R.W. Connell and Judith Butler, suggest that gender is a performance built on each action and reaction of an individual. This performance means that gender is not fixed, but evolves based on an individual and their actions and behaviors. In her book *Masculinities*, Connell explains that each new interaction provides a space for which gender performances can be changed and upheld.¹⁴ Such malleability makes gender and masculinity not as much a social institution an individual comes to inhabit but one

that is shaped by the many actions and reactions performed by the population trying to explore and fill the role. Butler agrees with this theory in her book, *Gender Trouble*, stating, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expression’ that are said to be its results.”¹⁵ Furthering this theory, Butler expresses the need to continuously play the role of masculinity in order to preserve the illusion.¹⁶ In this way, individuals wishing to be perceived as masculine must determine how best to perform masculinity and upon doing so repeat the behaviors in order to instill and uphold their masculinity for others. Thus there is a sliding scale on which men can choose to approach masculinity, testing the limits all the time, while preserving the elements they deem necessary to their identity.

Masculinity is a deeply researched topic by one particular sociologist, Michael Kimmel, who has gone so far as to write an encyclopedia on men and masculinity. In his encyclopedia, Kimmel explains that masculinity changes based on situational variation including a society’s evolution, an individual’s development, differing cultures, and gender socialization.¹⁷ Each minute change brings a new performance which paired with such broad origins explains just how vast gendered performances are. As people progress through their lives, maturing, and gaining more experience and insight, there is the potential for people to develop new and different portrayals of masculinity. The performances that play out in bromances sit on the very edges of the limits, and in doing so, help to widen them.

Previous Friendship Studies

Just like many other elements of society, friendship has become highly gendered and performance based, and as such each individual’s performance of and in a friendship determines others’ perceptions of said individual. Migliaccio puts it well when he states, “‘doing friendship’

is ‘doing gender.’”¹⁸ Good friendships are said to maintain a level of intimacy that is exclusive to that pairing of people. However emotional intimacy is not lauded by men as “The ideal form of intimacy is based on a feminine definition, thus failing to account for male interaction styles.”¹⁹ The fear of appearing effeminate forces many men to play off their friendships as more masculine and less emotionally constructed than they are or by not developing as deep a connection as they might like in a friendship. In order to prevent the risk of being misconstrued as more feminine, men simply evade any actions that could be misperceived. The change comes in the lost opportunity for the development of “expressive intimacy in friendships and self-disclosing with friends.”²⁰ The expectations of gender performance in a friendship forces same-sex male friendship into a box, as ‘manly men’ are expected to be emotionless. Migliaccio explains that many masculine-identifying individuals develop friendships through shared experiences instead of discussion.²¹ So while some women will sit around discussing issues and how they feel, men will find commonality and intimacy in a game of basketball, a fishing trip, or a crazy adventure. Some men still seek the ‘expressive friendships’ and find success in maintaining their masculinity by building up the manly elements of their friendship, which allows them to bring focus back to that aspect of themselves.²² Male friendships are said to be characterized by the masculine elements they maintain, and their performance has more validity if those carry the most weight. Support is given in masculine ways in order to maintain the social image, “When men want to express affection to one another, their means are rather limited. In the place of directness, we’ve developed ritualized gestures which are safer, and a lot more ambiguous.”²³ There is comfort for men in showing their affection in a less-than-affectionate manner, thus controlling others perceptions of them as more hardened.

Bromance

The previously stated expectations for male friendship are shattered by the idea of a ‘bromance,’ which calls into question all that is understood of a man in a same-sex friendship. Michael DeAngelis explains the concept by stating that, “‘Bromance’ has come to denote an emotionally intense bond between presumably straight males who demonstrate an openness to intimacy that they neither regard, acknowledge, avow, nor express sexually.”²⁴ A bromance breaks all social norms and expectations for a male friendship by suggesting both emotional and physical attachment. The confusion of a bromance comes in the form of mirroring the will-they-won’t-they of an intimate heterosexual friendship, as those not directly involved seek to understand the middle ground of a friendship that is more than every other friendship while still remaining less than a romantic relationship. DeAngelis explains that, “If bromancers are close friends who are always more than ‘just friends,’ their relationships are neither sexually nor procreatively goal oriented... bromance sustains its identity from the anticipation of a sexual ‘something’ that will never happen.”²⁵ The hypersexualized nature of bromances would appear to give a more homoerotic edge, however the knowledge that nothing sexual will come from the relationship provides a certainty within the relationship that does not exist in other sexualized relationships in college. It may be more likely that this characteristic of bromance relationships builds on the social acceptance of men having high sex drives. This social norm develops from the expectation of men to repress most true emotions which, “leaves only aggression and sexuality as accepted channels for the release of emotional energy.”²⁶ The remaining means for emotional release play well into a bromance as it allows for men to express their sexual interests in an almost belligerent manner, while not falling in the bad light of society by acting out against women.

This would line up well with the assertions made by several authors that the key to maintain masculinity in friendship performances is by not appearing too effeminate.²⁷ Depending on each individual and their relationships, the portrayal of masculinity differs provided they are maintaining their image through the adherence to some norms. David and Brannon explain the variability of acceptable behavior when stating, “Most social roles involve very few exact behaviors. More often they consist of clear but general guidelines as to how to conduct oneself.”²⁸ These so called guidelines provide space for development of individual growth and performances, which change throughout life and especially in periods of development and spaces of learning.

Masculine Development for Young Adults

The constructs placed on men are not always how they would like to act but instead are limiters on what they feel comfortable doing without risking being ostracized. In interviews with high school students, Michael Kehler found that students denounced the term ‘gay’ as a trigger insult, however they failed to understand the concept of male-male love being anything aside from gay.²⁹ This failure to understand any delineations reveals that for many individuals, masculinity is a two-sided coin: heterosexual or homosexual.³⁰ The distinctions of masculinity are reminiscent of the distinctions made between gender norms, as they set developing adolescents up for ostracization. In *Dude, You’re a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, C. J. Pascoe explains one of many societal limits, touching. Pascoe states that, “While girls touched other girls across social environments, boys usually touched each other in rule-bound environments (such as sports) or as a joke to imitate fags.”³¹ The variation between societal norms for boys and girls demonstrates the gendered expectations and the unstated rules that follow these obligations. The limitation of emotional comprehension and gray areas

preserves the societal idea of heteromascularity for these high school boys who now have a stunted understanding of love and the emotional possibilities within a masculine performance.

College tends to be a good location for the development of masculinity performance; the lines of acceptable and unacceptable are easily identifiable due to the similarities between the members of the population and their close proximity to one another. Sarah Lafleur documents this very sentiment in her research by expressing the idea that college gives space to attempt different performances as well as a context for self-identification by providing outlets for experimentation without the fear of severe repercussions.³² This opportunity is bolstered by the glorification of college as the best time of a person's life, where one can experiment with less pressure from the society that raised the individual. Individuals in college tend to be more often classified as emerging adults and tend to have more reckless behavior while looking for thrill.³³ The college environment as a whole dares guys to develop themselves into men while providing a space for them to test the limits of their societal role.

College also poses a challenge for many men who have limited development in the ways of socialization and emotion management. In college, men are met with new challenges to their identity, and they often are faced with emotional conflict which is difficult for them to understand due to their stunted emotional development.³⁴ The wrap-around learning that takes place in college focuses on emotional maturation for some while others grow more stable. This age group and time period is typified by, "Less stable financial situations, interpersonal relationships, living arrangements, cognitive and emotional development, and religious believes."³⁵ The lack of certainty in these areas forces this cohort to experience a lack of stability that encourages experimentation and exploration; this is exemplified by both bromances and casual sexual encounters. These activities may be an exploration of gender performance as the

interactions are set in an atmosphere where norms are bent, even if only temporarily. Such an environment can also help to cause a permanent shift in the cultured gender norms.

For the last several decades, society put men in a box saying all men are stoic and emotionless. Our culture then aligned itself with the box and naturalized this specific form of expectations for masculine behavior. David and Brannon argue that there are guidelines for male sex roles, “[we] believe that there are four such general themes, or dimensions, which underlie the male sex role we see in our culture...: 1. No Sissy Stuff, 2. The Big Wheel, 3. The Sturdy Oak, and Give ‘Em Hell!”³⁶ These four elements are believed to comprise the expectations for an American man’s man, and often times men bend to the whims of society. Sometimes exceptions to male expectations are made for homoerotic behaviors due to situational acceptance of these behaviors as parodies in the name of heteromascularity. Lafleur describes such an experience in her research at a Catholic college during a male beauty pageant as she states, “Under the guise of making fools of themselves through behavior not explicitly condoned outside of the performance, the contestants perform and reaffirm the importance of heterosexuality and masculinity.”³⁷ These provisions of situationally acceptable ‘gay actions’ provides men with the opportunity to express their more emotional and effeminate side, albeit in a joking manner, without fear of retribution from society.

This literature indicates that men want and enjoy closer relationships with each other, however in order to maintain their heterosexuality and masculinity they must compensate for their feminine qualities and actions through actions that move them up the masculine ladder. These usually come at the lowering of others, specifically homosexuals and women. Brinkman, Isacco, and Rosén examine the opposite half of put-downs as they discuss college men as targets, explaining that both male and female friends will comment on a man’s veering from accepted

portrayals of masculinity.³⁸ This conclusion of shared likelihood was contrary to their hypothesis and the literature that indicated men would be more likely to put each other down. In this way, the traditional performances of masculinity become so widely accepted that the peer policing becomes stricter and as such, it can be assumed that men would need to take more action to preserve the standards. Kehler goes past this to assert that in certain social circles the proclivity for heterosexuality is so high that it is assumed to be inherent, “Heterosexuality is seen as natural, not a performance.”³⁹ Throughout the study, Kehler found that in order to perpetuate this atmosphere the young men in his study would regularly fall back to “othering” and homophobia to reassert their position.⁴⁰ In distancing themselves from non-masculine groups, men are showing those around them that they must in this way be more masculine. Brinkman, Isacco, and Rosén explain that this trend of putting people down comes from, as previously stated, a need for balance in gender expression.⁴¹ The article states, “As intimacy and expressions of emotions are often considered feminine and thus, non-masculine, men may seek to balance their less masculine friendships with other expressions of masculinity.”⁴² This idea of balance is also seen in Kehler’s writings as he shares the story of one interviewee’s birthday present (a porn magazine) which showed contrasting expressions of love from his friends with hypermasculinity.⁴³ Thus men are given the opportunity to express deeper emotion toward others as long as they rise to the expectations of society in other arenas. This supports this paper’s contention that hookup culture provides a needed contrast to bromances.

This balancing act is crucial for men who enter “feminine territory,” such as ballet and cheerleading. Haltom and Worthen explored collegiate ballet through the lens of male dancers, and they found that male dancers fought the negative conceptions by doing three things, “(a) emphasizing heterosexual privilege, (b) comparing ballet to sports, and (c) classifying ballet as

an elite art form.”⁴⁴ The subjects in this study asserted their heteromascularity by presenting the outsider with an idea of how extremely masculine ballet can be. They bolster their argument with reasoning including discussions on the number of attractive women they interact with and the higher level of difficulty dancing can be.⁴⁵ When neither of these strategies work, they accept the possibility that others may view them as less masculine, by negating the opinion of people who simply do not understand. By working off of these strategies, the dancers are able to balance the perceptions of both homoerotic behaviors and heteromascularity behaviors. Male cheerleaders experiences similar societal misconstructions, however they choose one of two ways, orthodox masculinity or inclusive, to handle the misconceptions that come with the sport, as reported by Anderson.⁴⁶ The first group of male cheerleaders—orthodox cheerleaders—plays upon constant overt sexism and slightly more inconspicuous homophobia to build their masculine performance. Anderson explained the tendencies of this group by stating “Most of the men in the orthodox group stressed their athleticism and their masculinity, and they attempted to distance themselves from acting feminine or being perceived as gay.”⁴⁷ The second group was the antithesis of the first, with very gay-friendly attitudes and homoerotic behavior, as many described themselves as ‘metrosexual.’⁴⁸ The contrasting sides of the spectrum still managed to produce men deemed masculine, which shows how sometimes it is not as much about how you portray your masculinity but how much you portray your own confidence in your gender identity.

Approaching masculinity through confidence is an underlying theme in the literature, which builds on the idea that masculinity is related to asserting confidence in your manliness to the point of not caring what others think. This was found to be especially true for the inclusive cheerleading squad, as Anderson presented one of his conclusions, “Because these men had a culturally positive association with homosexuality, homophobia ceased to be a tool for masculine

marginalization.”⁴⁹ By eliminating the attached stigma, individuals are free to associate however they like, knowing that societal standards do not need to limit them, which is a significant change from Kehler’s subjects in high school who were walking the tenuous path of masculinity.⁵⁰ Additionally, this confidence is central to stigma management in ballet, as the men assert that at the end of the day they know that all it takes to be a man is to peddle their gender performance, because even heteromale men can have more feminine personality traits.⁵¹ The men who take part in the pageant as discussed by Lafleur use the same level of thinking as they allow people to think whatever they wish, knowing all along that they are secure and confident in their sexuality, which will translate to their audience.⁵² The nonchalance of this approach turns questions of femininity around on themselves, placing those of question in control of their destination.

The Male Role in Hookup Culture

Bromance is a relatively new term, but it harkens back to the findings surrounding the use of compensatory hypermasculinity to balance out homoerotic behaviors. There has been some theorizing, specifically by Michael Kimmel, on the growing hookup cultural movement. In *Guyland*, Kimmel shows the significance of hooking up for college men on the performance of masculinity.⁵³ Kimmel states early on, in reference to a David Mamet quote, that women are just a form of money men use to build their status with men.⁵⁴ Kimmel makes similar statements in a chapter on hookup culture. He draws the conclusion that hookups, for men, come down to the opportunity for advancement up the social ladder. “Hooking up is a way that guys communicate with other guys—it’s about homosociality. It’s a way that guys compete with each other, establish a pecking order of cool studliness, and attempt to move up in their rankings.”⁵⁵ Hooking up alone is a huge element of gender performativity, as showcased by Kimmel, because

it is a direct line to social mobility and representation on a man's behalf. It wards off questioning of an individual's sexuality by showing through action a man's intention which creates a socially synonymous link between sexual activity and masculinity. With casual sex growing in popularity and acceptability, and likely due to its appeal as a factor in social mobility, the act becomes less of a joint experience and more pertinent to an individual as an experience for themselves. More casual sexual relationships are said to mean more for the male participant as a fulfillment of sexual desire and personal needs.⁵⁶ These types of relationships are not seeking out emotional intimacy, but more often a desire to fulfill an animal instinct, which allows for the playing out of sexuality and aggression in a manner that is becoming increasingly more acceptable. Hooking up is seen as filling both a physical need as well as providing social mobility, which provides reason to why it is sought after for so much of the population.

Application

For this study, information on hookup culture as well as homophobia and hypermasculinity gives reason to how and why it has become more socially acceptable to partake in the more seemingly homoerotic bromance. Bromance can be linked with deep friendships like that of the students in Kehler's study and even the inclusive cheerleading squad in Anderson's research, as well as more physically aggressive behavior. The cultural trend is pockmarked by the same homoeroticism as well as the self-deprecating confidence of unabashed men found in several other studies. Additionally, the development of a culture of casual hookup sex provides relationships for men that become more based on the activity than communication of emotion. Relationships with male friends dig deeper, thus sex based relationships become more emotionally detached. By folding together these two contrasting ideas, this study examines how modern college men balance different elements of gender performance in order to be

continuously perceived as masculine, especially with the slow but continual inversion of the women to men ratio on college campuses.

Methodology

Seeing masculinity as a performance that shapes people's perceptions of self and each other, means it is not based on a single social institution but a collage of ongoing interactions, this study considered specifically two elements of college culture, bromance and casual sex, and their effects on the performance of masculinity in the shaping of individuals perceptions of self and others. This study used a series of interviews with five subjects; these interviews were made up of a semi-structured section as well as a set of open-ended questions. This format for the interviews ensured that the information was well-rounded and covered the topics while also being thorough and lending itself to each participant.

This study attempts to demonstrate that bromances are the male to male equivalent of closer than "just friends." Subjects were questioned as to how their bromances differ from other friendships and analyzed based on sexual and physical comfort as well as a deeper connection. The interviews' aim was to gather information to help with understanding the motives behind the hook-up culture in order to determine what, if any, ties they have to masculine performativity. In particular, this study will look for ties of both bromances and hook-up culture to self-perception as well as gender performance, specifically within male friend groups.

Sample

The list of interviewees was compiled based on a theoretical sampling procedure, as many of the subjects exhibit inherent qualities that line up with the culture and actions under study. Their use of bromances and hook up culture both publicly and privately manifest into a cisgender, heterosexual, male identity performance that has become known to their friends and

acquaintances. All subjects are white individuals, and while their race likely impacts how they perform masculinity, this social construct is controlled for in this study due to the already complex nature of the research.

The subjects are as follows:

1. Tyler—A sophomore Economics major who plays field hockey and is a resident assistant. He is very open and public about his close, seemingly sexual relationship with his longtime friend. Tyler enjoys flirting with his female friends and actively seeks out hook ups. Throughout his interview Tyler used analogies to explain his thinking. In addition, he regularly found ways to slip his heterosexual identity into conversation.
2. Harold—A senior who is majoring in English and plays for the golf team. Harold admits to actively seeking out casual sex, working toward several campus-based sexual fantasies. Harold returned several times to his impending graduation as a reference for his reasoning on several decisions or attitudes.
3. Matt—A junior math major and lacrosse player. Matt currently has a girlfriend but has significant hook up experience and is seen as quite a charmer. In addition, his close bromance with another math major is well-known around campus as they are seen together regularly and a reference point for many as a clear example of a bromance.
4. Xavier—A junior lacrosse player majoring in English. He switched friend groups in the past year and has seen distinct functions in each. Although he has had a few serious relationships, he has returned to single life and casual hook ups. Xavier has had several personal struggles in his life which have shaped him, as does his close friendship with a female friend from home. During his interview, Xavier would often remove himself from the equation while discussing his friends, relationships, and actions.

Analysis

The interviews took place over several weeks lasting between fifteen and thirty-five minutes. Due to the variability of the information obtained through the interviews as well as their structure, the analysis of the data was built on coding which looked for specific patterns and themes within the interviews and the subjects' body language. When collated, the themes help to form support for the theoretical arguments on the use of bromances and casual sex for the formation of gender identity performance in male college students born in the mid-1990s.

Bromances versus Friendships

Most of the literature agrees that there are many elements to the definition of a bromance, which included a more than "just friends" relationship comprised of both emotional depth as well as the insinuation of physical interaction that can best be described as homoerotic. Throughout the interviews, participants were asked what elements make up a bromance. Many of the subjects agreed with the literature in some way or another. For example, Matt described his college bromance by saying, "We're a married couple." While this explanation leaves much to be interpreted, the definition helped make clear the relative depth of their relationship. Matt's assertion indicates that they are more than just friends, and while it is uncertain the level of physical intimacy they partake in, the atmosphere of their relationship seems straightforward, which is in line with the explanations DeAngelis puts forward about bromances.⁵⁷ Matt expanded on his bromance relationship with a story of how he and his close friend go to the gym together, which is followed by forty-five minutes of sitting around talking while they share protein powder shakes. This story indicates that there are several levels to their relationship, which exists on an emotional level but also exists because of their shared experience of going to the gym. This excursion is important in understanding their friendship as Matt expressed that he would not feel

comfortable working out with just anyone, and especially not a girl. This information indicates that their friendship is anchored, as theory suggests many male friendships are, by the quality time and memories that come with their regular gym visits (a very masculine activity in itself).

While speaking with Xavier on the definition of bromances, he provided a few different elements of a bromance. He first touched upon the mental support system that bromances can provide, “Normally, you have normal interactions of like guys, and say—it’s like a best friend and a bromance would also be like, you do almost everything together... you know almost everything about the other person.” Moreover, he explained that close male friends may also partake in, “the common phrase is you do like ‘gay things together,’” which is to say that they occasionally show their love physically. These types of interactions, both physical and mental, are less acceptable according to society’s masculinity standards. With all of that in mind, Xavier summed it up by explaining the reality of bromances which is “It’s basically like a sense of you’re almost dating them, just without any of the physical stuff, but like you’re there emotionally for them, everything else.” This builds on the idea that those who are in a bromance are more than ‘just friends’ and in addition, they act with their friend’s intentions in mind.

Both Xavier and Matt share stories of bromances wherein the people performing are sincere and ‘genuine actors,’ both in their beliefs as well as their portrayal to outside observers. While these subjects believe that bromances carry weight, other subjects and people in society would believe otherwise. The ‘cynical actors’ view bromances in a more shallow and joking manner, which was also represented in the interviews. Harold stated early on his disbelief in the whole bromance system, “I play it—it’s like a pretend thing,” For Harold, the emotional bond is less obvious in the bromance and as such the whole relationship type becomes more of a funny joke, as opposed to a loving and developed bond with a friend or colleague. He describes the

bromance as more of a long running joke than a true bond. These jokes are so deeply rooted in gender performativity for Harold that he does not see bromances as being anything more than a game or being perceived as one by others.

Emotional Bond

A true bromance creates a bond between two individuals whose relationship provides an openness that gender performance usually dictates men cannot have. Open communication in friendships is usually considered a feminine trait. As such, when men can partake they hold on tight to the individual with whom they have connected. Tyler spoke volumes on this subject, at one point stating, “We can talk about things that we want to do, like in the future, whether it be work, school... like he’s involved, like, for the rest of my life, in some way, shape, or form... like I’m going to be at his wedding, he’s going to be at my wedding. We’ll probably be best men for each other. He is for me at least.” While this statement would likely mean very little coming from a woman, the open expression of love from one man toward another indicates the depth of this relationship, a depth that Tyler does not find in any other relationship.

These deeper friendships can be compared to the lighter friendships that the subjects have and which usually arise from shared experiences. Matt told of his high school friends who had a weekly guys’ night, “Since like our sophomore year of high school we had Guys Night once a week, like that was like consistent. Always. No girls allowed, and we just like get f***ed up,” and while they have gone onto college and no longer get together on a weekly basis, when they do get together it becomes a wild adventure. While their friendships likely go deeper than these crazy nights, the retelling of this story indicates, as Migliaccio would suggest, that Matt would want the audience to perceive that his friendships are based less on emotion, which would be considered effeminate, and more on shared experience.⁵⁸

Physicality

While the emotional attachment that is suggested by some bromances may make them appear to be similar to any close female friendship, the physical nature of it creates a bit more of a contrast between all male and all female friendships. There are two specific aspects that were repeatedly reported in data collection: homoerotic behavior and hypersexualization of each other as well as engagement in brute force.

In regards to the hypersexuality, Tyler's description of his attitudes sums it up well, "My close friends, I'm close with in the sense, like, I'm huggy, like I'll hug them... we can jump on each other, and stuff, and we can be like naked in the same room, it doesn't matter." Tyler's bromance, which has matured through college, shows a deep love which, if set in a different context, would easily be perceived as existing in a homosexual couple. Tyler's friendships exhibit truly homoerotic behavior that generations previous to this would not have been quite as accepting of, however it comes from a balance that Tyler creates with his friends, which indicates that there is more to his masculinity performance than would first be assumed.

Tyler described in quick succession both his love-y side, as previously stated, then a more aggressive side, as he stated, "My close friends that I've known my entire life, we'll likely wrestle, and like punch each other. Slap each other... But like in my mind, I don't do anything sexual." His specification on his thinking indicates that he is still cognizant of how his performance may be perceived, which likely encouraged him to clarify his thinking. With that said, his statements mirrored the sentiments of subjects in Lafleur's study, who felt that their behavior was acceptable situationally due to their purposeful intention to be perceived as fools.⁵⁹ Moreover, research suggests that the interactions between Tyler and his friends come from the need for an emotional release that becomes channeled through brutality and hypersexualization.

Harold's experiences are similar in the over exaggeration of actions toward each other, as he explained that when he and his friends pretend to have a bromance their affectionate expressions push the limits, "If we're going to be affectionate, it's going to be over the top, and like really try to cross boundaries." These sentiments reflect a need to make the performance overtly fake for not just the individuals involved but also anyone watching. With that said, Harold elaborated on the possibility of misinterpretation of sexuality by stating that, "if they didn't know us, maybe... but at that point if they didn't know us, why would I care?" Harold's thought process lines up with the belief that if confidence in your performance is not enough then negation of opinions is the solution. In othering and negating opinion, Harold is able to maintain his position on the social ladder by simply refusing to acknowledge his competitors.

The "Line"

While the participants seem to come to a consensus on both an emotional expectation as well as a strangely physical connection within a bromance, they tend to have varying degrees of understanding as to where the line of acceptable and too far is located.

Some of the subjects provided clear specification about the location of the line by identifying elements of any other sexual relationship that, for them, go too far for bromance relationships. Xavier specified that, "If he's kissed me, that's where I draw the line," while Xavier took a second to reason through his thoughts, Matt was very specific and assertive with, "He doesn't touch me." Matt's answer came with a layer of almost aggression, and after some coaxing he eventually followed up with an explanation stating, "Let's just say, I wasn't as cultured when I came here. I was extremely homophobic when I came here; I would not respond well... I just don't like being touched. I hate PDA, guy or girl." Upon hearing a further explanation, it seems that Matt's line comes originally from a homophobic place or at least a fear

of homosexual perceptions, but after even further explanation, his hatred seems to lie even deeper. Though he seems to have matured slightly through college, as one would expect, he still holds some deep-seated fear of perceived homosexuality. This fear may be entrenched in his perception as sexuality being one of two fixed points and not a part of fluid spectrum, similar to the subjects of Pascoe's research.⁶⁰ Furthermore, while his reasoning still seems hazy, there seems to be a link back to the expectations of masculinity set forth by David and Brannon, which state that society encourages men to portray themselves as strong as well as emotionally and physically detached.⁶¹

For some individuals, the line comes not from any one specific action, but having the action taken toward them. Tyler spoke profusely about the various hypersexualized activities he partook in with the other half of his bromance, "We can jump on each other and stuff and we can be like naked in the same room, it doesn't matter." While this may seem a bit over the top, Tyler definitively expressed his boundaries by stating that, "I don't like kissing men, because I'm still straight, like some guys like are open enough to do that with friends that they're close to." If that is not evidence enough, moments later, Tyler asserted that he was not interested in, "Doing anything actually gay, like any activity that would be homosexual in my mind so that would be kissing, any physical representation of love making." On the surface, it seems as if it may be about the act for Tyler. However, by putting it through the lens of things that are 'gay,' it becomes not about the act but about the perception that would come with the act, so while he seemed to have more liberal views on acceptable acts with bromances, his clear distinguisher as not partaking, condemns the act. Moreover, he attempts to soften his opinion by making a provision that other straight friends might do it without judgement from him.

Tyler does make a few concessions to situationally acceptable ‘gay things,’ as he explained that he would have to be under the influence of some alcohol or the like, “If I was super drunk and didn’t remember or I didn’t know what I was doing then if I did it involuntarily then I wouldn’t care, but I’m not gonna want to do it. And then like, there’s no like intercourse, that’s not going to happen.” By condemning these actions, Tyler is able to create a space between himself and the possible misperception placed on him. He is provided an easy way out from being misidentified while also appearing accepting, with his answer umbrella-ing him with a covert homophobic statement. In this way, Tyler can present himself as a good guy while also asserting his personal dominance. This is a classic display of the ‘othering’ technique, which is used by some groups to maintain control over their perceived masculinity due to an ingrained homophobia which is not reflected immediately in their statements.

Hook-up Culture

These men have developed deeper emotional bonds to other individuals, showing themselves to have a more ‘feminine’ side. However, the possibility of being mistaken for having a more effeminate personality still weighs on them, leading to definite gender performances that take place in both day to day conversation as well as nights out. Casual sex provides an outlet for expression as well as fulfills needs and, as such, becomes a factor in masculinity performance.

Both Tyler and Harold expressed in a clear and concise manner that, in an ideal night out they end it ‘getting laid.’ This ideology indicates that whether or not they are actually successful in approaching women or taking someone home, an elemental aspect of their perfect evening involves casual sex. Moreover, the little intention behind who they are particularly interested in

ending the night with indicates that for them the purpose of the sex is purely fulfilling their sexual desires and need.

Additionally, these nights out provide men with a bonding experience, that plays back into their need to base friendships in experiences as opposed to emotion. Tyler discussed wingman-ing at length, as he felt it was important to support each other in “getting some.” In this way, picking up girls becomes a group effort and a new memory for Tyler and his friends.

Xavier’s explanation for this approach to the night out gives a bit more meaning to their desire to have sex. As he stated, “If I’m going to pursue a girl at the bar... for that it’s more of like a stress release sort of thing.” He explains that for his friend’s group pursuing and then having sex is not a need to have an emotional connection but for the emotional and hormonal release. This speaks directly to the college culture’s acceptance of releasing energy through a sexual manner, which is an extension of Ludeman’s explanation of the few acceptable means for men to release excess hormones or emotions.⁶²

The Role of Peer Pressure

While collecting data, the topic of “wingman-ing” came up across the board. Everyone involved mentioned the role male college students played in each other’s love lives. Upon further discussion, it became apparent that not only were friends helping others ‘get laid’ they or their friends may feel inclined, due to the presence of others, to see where things go even when they had no interest in a woman at the bar. Still others indicated that some wingman-ing and hooking up came solely from the desire for fulfillment of sexual needs and not from any interest in the woman involved. Some interviewees did not overtly express these types of situations occurring, but many remarked on the possibility.

Xavier was able to recognize that peer pressure factors into a night out and ‘the pursuit of girl,’ despite strong feelings that he was not personally affected by this peer pressure, he explained that there were expectations with his friends to make headway each night out. In Xavier’s friend group, a night out was key for proving your dominance, “It was almost all about the pursuit of girl... the common interaction was like, ‘who’d you talk to tonight,’ ‘whose numbers did you get’ and then they wanted to know stories the next day or whatever else, and that’s kinda their goals.” The expectation that members of the friends group will all make strides in the evening and ‘get some action,’ as expressed by Xavier, implies the significance of casual sex to acting within the group dynamic. Kimmel might suggest that this is part of developing the pecking order of masculinity. The women and sex act as a social currency as those involved were able to quantify their masculinity and move up the social ladder.

While he did not explicitly state it, Harold understood the social pressures of hooking up and its worth as social currency. He expressed that while his friends had never actually made him feel like he had to hook up with anyone, being out with a different friend group could impact the pressure on him to perform. Harold explained that, “I mean if I was hanging out with the ____ team that might be different, ‘cause they all get around a lot more, but again I’m usually not [with them],” in considering this possible and even plausible scenario, Harold is in essence admitting that hook-up culture and casual sex plays some part in climbing the social ladder.

The most telling situation of peer-pressure came from Matt who, when asked whether he had ever pressured his friends to hook-up with a girl, told with a laugh, “Oh yeah, it’s so funny... If they’re [his friends] really drunk. The girl—say the girl’s— super super ugly, and like you like know he’s gonna wake up and be like ‘Oh, f***.’ And you’re like ‘oh how funny would this be,’ and like you do it [set them up].” In recounting the scene and the girl’s appearance, he asserts to

the interviewer his masculine performance and his dominance over his friends. Moreover, he objectifies both the girl and the act to show the lengths people will go to maintain social position. This is similar to Pascoe's explanation about touching, where she explains that boys touching girls, "took the form of a ritualistic power play that embedded gender meaning of boys as powerful and girls as submissive."⁶³ While Pascoe's explanation is a bit more toned down in action, in essence they both are expressing the idea that people can be played against each other and objectified for the entertainment of others.⁶⁴

Masculine Identity and Public Perception

Even while using the different elements of college culture to shape their identities, sometimes men will see a seemingly skewed public perception of themselves and put in additional effort to appear especially manly; the need to make up this difference manifests as compulsive hypermasculinity. This effort comes through less in specific stories or situations and more in the language used as well as their behavior and the approaches to conversation taken within the interviews. These relate back to Dramaturgy, specifically manner and appearance, as they are additional aspects of performativity and greatly impact the believability of an individual's performance.

For example, Tyler regularly slipped in references to his heterosexuality throughout the discussion, which was significantly longer than any of the others. Only two minutes into the conversation, when prompted about his sexuality, he explained that he was, "strictly heterosexual." Ten minutes later, when discussing a good night out he stated that, "At the end of the night, I get laid," with further prompting on whether it would be an acquaintance or stranger, he did not feel it was necessary to specify either way. Though after a few seconds went by and we began to move on, he went back to make especially clear that the interaction would have to

be with a woman. While these seem like small details of the interview, Tyler remained assertive throughout the interview that he was in fact attracted to women, and in so doing pushed a very obvious gender performance into the interview. In forcing the issue, Tyler's gender performance became less genuine, which Goffman would say makes it feel less authentic and more forced for the audience. This behavior also indicated that Tyler was not as comfortable with his heteromascularity performance as he would like to let on, and as such beefed up his compensatory sexuality, which in turn made both the audience and him less confident in the perceptions versus the reality of his gender identity.

Several times throughout the interview process I found that subjects would express sentiments that implied acting in an open manner with their thoughts and feelings made them less masculine, and when they act in such a way they go against the norms, a belief that is supported by literature. When speaking about his past, Xavier stated that, "I use to be very, very open about just talking about just anything, any whatever—making fun of myself, doing what non-masculine type things," within his anecdote, Xavier implies that manly men cannot share emotion or show their burden, because in doing so it implies the individual is less of a man. Furthermore, Xavier shared that by maintaining close friendships with homosexual boys in high school he very quickly was lumped in with them. Xavier's understanding of high school lines up with the literature that found that for many high school boys, masculinity was not a spectrum and if you were gay you could not also be masculine. However, as the research on cheerleading squads indicates, friendships with homosexual men can be played off if there is confidence in the friendship.⁶⁵ Xavier expressed that he was still very much involved with these friends as he no longer felt the need to contextualize those friendships for others, nor were others as pointed with

their expectations and understandings of Xavier. In this way, Xavier's progression and development line up well with that of college students.

Unlike Xavier and who shared a developed understanding, one subject was very vocal about his frustration with the constant reminders that he was tiny or weak. He explained throughout the interview that it was a painful part of his life that he is reminded of nearly daily as people, both strangers and friends alike, point it out regularly. This discussion indicated that for some social circles in college the general themes presented by David and Brannon "1. No Sissy Stuff, 2. The Big Wheel, 3. The Sturdy Oak, and Give 'Em Hell!" still weighed heavily on many men and their perception of masculinity.⁶⁶ For this subject, the need to appear naturally strong and in charge pushed him to compensate throughout the conversation.

Though some of our subjects struggled with the question of emasculation, Xavier made a point that says a lot about the male population as a whole. Xavier said, "Yeah, I've definitely been made fun of for not being masculine enough... that's always—everyone has been." While Xavier may not be able to speak for a whole demographic, his thought says a lot about many of the reactions I received to questions of emasculation and not being 'man-enough.' While some of the subjects adamantly stated that they had never been emasculated, their body language told a different story, which only goes to show that part of the performance of masculinity includes not showing weakness, or in this case not admitting that, at times, their confidence in their performance was encroached upon. This goes back to the previous studies that found that a believable portrayal of masculinity came through using confidence to compensate as opposed to language or behavior.

Confidence

While confidence was never specifically discussed in the interviews, several of the men insinuated that their skills or lack thereof were a determinant in their masculinity. Such suggestions depreciate the authenticity of their gender performance as they force the audience to question their own perceptions of the men as well as the ideas they have built up around manliness, their masculinity generalities.

Matt is a prime example of self-confidence based masculinity performance. Toward the end of his interview he asserted his dominance by proudly stating that, “Most guys, if they want to hook up with a girl, they have to try, whereas I have to try to not to... because I don’t want to.” His self-assured display, both towards the interviewer as well as to others, plays right into the theories presented on the ballet dancers and cheerleaders, who defended their gender performance simply by being confident in who they are. Later on, he used this method again when he stated, in regard to emasculation, that “It’s just not really a concern.” While both of these statements help to present a clear defense against homosexual perceptions the latter presented a crack. His fault in this response was not what he said but the body language that accompanied it. When asked to consider the possibility of his peers not considering him ‘man enough’ the outwardly confident, extroverted individual being interviewed receded into his chair, swaying slightly from discomfort with the question. In addition, the quick rate at which he answered this question signaled that the subject was a touchy one which he would like to move on from. This is indicative that while most individuals wish others to believe their performance, they themselves may not be quite as sure in their claim, and may not be able to cover up all of their underlying thoughts and feelings within their performance. Because of this uncertainty, their performance of masculinity feels less true to the audience. Additionally, the failed attempt

to cover up their insecurities makes the audience trust the actor less in addition to their performance.

Several subjects spoke in a manner that caused similar doubts. Harold repeatedly expressed personal insecurities about his inability to pick up girls as readily as his male counterparts, which harkens back to the other studies that expressed the importance of casual sex to social mobility for men which in turn aids in a confident performance of masculinity and gender identity for college men. Tyler expresses a similar sentiment, when asked about how his experiences line up to those of his friends. In order to express, what he sees as handicaps, he builds a metaphor, “Tyler has what we call octagon wheels, like they’ll still turn, but it’s not as smooth as a circle. So like other people are better at ‘wheeling.’” This little story, which Tyler returns to throughout the rest of his interview, is his way of showing he feels his gender performance and ability to pick up women is not as strong as his friends and as such he feels his friends are more successful in asserting their masculinity performance. Seeing as hooking-up is built into moving up the social ladder, Tyler’s story shows that he is under the impression he is farther down on the ladder, which weighs on his confidence. In turn, his audience takes his masculinity performance as less genuine. Hooking up seems deeply ingrained in confidence in masculinity performance. For many college men, it is believed to be a key indicator of a man’s sexuality and skill which is still intertwined in this cohort’s perceptions of masculinity. This hypersexualization of college social life acts to offset any behaviors of men that could be indicative of the individual being more effeminate.

Further Research

Over the course of the interviews, several threads wove in and out that have potential for continued consideration. These themes did not directly relate to the theories and literature

presented in this paper, and as such they are not pertinent to data analysis. However, the patterns that ran through multiple interviews warrants a focused study.

One such topic was close, emotionally-deep, female friendships. Several subjects stated that they have at least one woman in their lives that they feel comfortable conversing with and knew that women were more open to discussions of their feelings. For example, Xavier spoke of two close female friendships, one at home and one in college, and explained how their friendships were more open. Xavier said, “Most of my female friends, uh, seem a little more understanding and easier to talk to and there isn’t the feeling of the competitive environment [like with guys].” While he provides this insight into his own life, he indicates that he is not alone in this thinking, expressing that his impression is that of widespread emotionally deep friendships between opposite gender individuals. Stating, “Most of the guys I ever talk to or have known tend to have a way close relationship with at least one other female friend... no matter what there’s always like a girl—female friend that a guy connects very well with and just openly shares a lot,” Xavier opens up the theoretical possibility that just as men have their bromances, people of the opposite sex can fall into that middle ground between just friends, close friends, and something more. With limited research background on male-female relationships, it is plausible that these intense bonds help with the continuation of hookup culture, as the emotional needs of both individuals involved are being fulfilled, while their sexual needs are still unmet. Seeing as many of these individuals are still seeking a physical connection they are prone to hooking-up, because there is no need to find an emotional connection with the individual they are involved with on a physical level. Furthermore, in an era of instant connection with a hundred other people, there is always the opportunity for something better and by partaking in casual sex again and again the participants experience more variety.

Many of the subjects were in agreement that the heavy use of sarcasm aided communication within their relationships and friendships. There is a strength in being able to turn any misfortune or insecurity into a joke, as it helps build walls around a person. In addition, the use of sarcasm opens the door to clear and obvious conversations on a seemingly taboo subject. By examining further the usage of sarcasm, researchers could look both at communication in these relationships as well as the handling of difficult subjects in these friends group.

This research is still very much in a developmental stage, as so many individuals are looking into similar trends and their results have yet to be brought to a large audience.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the study. First and foremost, due to time constraints the subject size was especially small, meaning that these theories and hypotheses are at best patterns seen on a small scale. The theoretical sample's origin, within just Elmira College, in Elmira NY, also indicates that the sample pool would be limited by the student population who voluntarily decided to attend Elmira College. The breadth of the research is also limiting as it does not take into consideration further factors in the formation of gender identity such as family life and relationship history.

I, as a woman researching the topic, inherently bring biases and assumptions to the analysis and study, which become intertwined with the assertions made within the paper. Because I am a cisgender woman examining male and masculine tendencies, I also must consider an element of translational loss, as I am an outsider examining a population and will not and can never fully understand the scope of this population's actions and thoughts.

Conclusion

Symbolic interactionism indicates that every person is putting on a performance and as such are wheeling and dealing in performativity. Some people realize they are performing and can manipulate others based on their actions. Other individuals remain mostly oblivious to the performances given throughout life. These performances are a part of just about every aspect of our lives and as such feel naturalized the majority of the time. However, there is a difference between an action being natural and an action feeling truthful, which can be seen in gender performativity.

This is especially important as it relates to masculinity performance for men in college, as the setting provides them with a space to experiment and explore perceptions as they build confidence in their performance while attempting to weed out their personal truth. The developmental course they go through forces them to address this elephant in the room, as they realize they have some control over others perceptions. This can be difficult to grapple with as trying to define your authentic self becomes not just an individual search but also a public display when part of college social life.

The college culture trends make this experience particularly exaggerated as they encourage students to play on both opposing edges of their gender. This comes in the form of bromances and hook-up culture playing both with hypersexualization of both males and females in addition to emotional attachment and aversion. The dichotomous nature of bromances and hook-ups provide two distinct settings for a multitude of interactions and identity performances.

Identity performance comes down to using each interaction to convince those involved that the identity and actions of each said individual is genuine and true. This paper shared evidence indicating the complexities of both the singular and collective performances that allows college men to develop their own identity expression. However, no matter how much they assert

themselves and act in a manner that would shape the outer world's perceptions, no one has complete control over how the world sees them and as such no one has the capabilities to fully shape their identity. Moreover, just as each individual shapes the world and the world's perceptions of them, the world shapes the individual's perceptions of themselves. While in interviews, some subjects put forward that they did not care at the end of the day how the greater world perceives them, in this way they suggested their identity was not actively shaped by their audience.

However, identity is a performance, and society shapes each individual more than they would like to admit or even consider regularly. Admitting this often times is admitting failure in one's ability to be in control of their actions. One subject, Tyler, struggles with society's impact on his own identity and explains specifically how he handles the suggestion that he might be 'small':

I'm a sarcastic person in the sense that like... I'll try and low-key play on the fact that like a lot of people like call me like tiny... I'll be sarcastic in the sense and say... "I'm huge. I'm awesome. I'm hot." ... I'll go along that sense a lot and I'll be like 'Yeah, I'm modest,' *laughs* ... I'm not modest, but like I'm also like being sarcastic when I say all those things because like I hate them so much, so like I'll say the opposite to be funny, and sarcastic... Cause like, a lot of people have said otherwise, so there's gotta be truth in that regard too. That's why I hate it. Umm... but like I'm still like sexy, so. Get it! I'm doing it again.

While he went on to joke about it and boost himself by asserting that he was still attractive, he was clearly impacted by the need to repeatedly offset these statements by asserting his masculinity. This opens the question of what level of impact public perception has both on an individual's understanding of themselves as well as the outer world's perceptions of the individual. It seems that the repetitive enforcement of public perceptions on an individual forces them to believe there's truth to the societal markers, whether they want there to be or not. For Tyler, the actions he takes to perform his gender come from a wish to have his identity perceived

as a genuine performance, however he knowingly is forced to realize it is at its core a performance after all. Tyler's actions indicate that he wants to be a 'sincere actor' as he wishes his performance was reality, but his need to be perceived as masculine forces him to continually buy into his own routine and be a 'cynical actor.' No person can truly remain oblivious to the peer pressures of society and its effect on them as social beings.

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