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“I’m METRO, NOT Gay!”: A Discursive Analysis of Men’s Accounts of Makeup Use on YouTube

The last two decades have seen a marked increase in men’s self-presentation practices and the creation of a new identity category: “metrosexual” (Simpson, 1994, 2002). Here we examine men’s makeup use, considered one of the more extreme indicators of “metrosexuality” (Harrison, 2008). We deploy a discursive analytic approach informed in particular by membership categorisation analysis (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992) to examine male makeup users’ responses to a young man’s online makeup tutorial posted on YouTube. In particular we focus on how the video creator and the respondents design and manage the accounts of their activities, paying particular attention to those gendered norms and categories invoked. What we find is that when contributors endorse or reference cosmetic use they invariably attempt to inoculate themselves against potential charges of being “gay”; our analysis highlights the strategies used to manage gender and sexual identities. In addition, we discuss the implications of the analysis for mapping contemporary masculinities.

Keywords: makeup use, metrosexuality, masculinity, discourse analysis, online identities

Modern men, it seems, are fascinated with their appearance, investing time and money in their personal appearance, through diet and lifestyle choices, fitness regimes, and the purchase of consumer goods, including clothing, accessories, and cosmetics. Between 2002 and 2006, the UK market for men’s grooming products tripled to £781m (Mintel, 2007). Britain’s second-largest beauty and health retailer Superdrug (2010) estimates the current male grooming market to be “worth an estimated £1.2 billion a year in the UK” (p. 1). Even in the current economic climate, analysts are forecasting

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a healthy 5 percent growth rate in the market (Mintel, 2010). Moreover, Superdrug (1) claims that men are now dedicating “83 minutes of every day to their personal grooming” (p. 1), some four minutes longer than the average woman’s daily beautification regime. It seems then that this trend is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. The change in men’s self-presentation practices has seen the emergence of the term “metrosexual” (Simpson, 1994, 2002) as a label for these men. In light of such trends, we examine one of the more extreme examples of metrosexual activity—cosmetics use (Harrison, 2008). In particular, we examine the way men who use cosmetics discuss their use of such products in response to an online makeup tutorial on *YouTube*. Drawing on a selection of the 334 written posts to a makeup tutorial, we focus on the design and management of these responses, with reference to the gendered norms and identities invoked.

Our aims then in this paper are twofold. Firstly, by examining a selection of men’s own accounts of their use of cosmetics we aim to contribute to the emergent body of literature on “metrosexuality.” The majority of studies on this phenomenon have been largely theoretical. For example, Miller (2006, 2009) studied trends in men’s consumption practices in the U.S. suggesting that these had been brought about by a political-economic shift in the labour market, one in which employers have commodified the male body. Coad (2008), on the other hand, argued that the marketing of high profile sports celebrities, such as international footballer David Beckham and Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe, are responsible for encouraging heterosexual men to “engage in practices stereotypically associated with femininity and homosexuality, such as care for appearance and the latest fashion trends” (p. 73). However, he goes one step further by arguing that “metrosexuality” challenges traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Because beautification and self-care have been conventionally associated with gay men and women, heterosexual “metrosexuality” represents a move beyond the constrictive bipolar categorizations masculine/feminine and hetero/homo. The impact of “metrosexuality” on gender and sexualities was a theme taken up by Carniel’s (2009) study of “metrosexuality” and Australian soccer. She found that although men were now more image-conscious, spurred on by the consumption practices of sporting celebrities, masculinities on display were in effect hybridizations of existing masculinities. In other words: “While metrosexuality re-socializes men as consumers, it does not necessarily alter other fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 81) because existing discourses of masculinity which favour heterosexuality, strength, violence, risk taking and so on are still readily available and frequently drawn upon.

Notwithstanding the insights into metrosexual phenomena offered by these studies, we know little how self-identified “metrosexuals” construct this identity for themselves. Furthermore, these studies they are largely analyst-centered sociological interpretations of the phenomenon, presenting “metrosexuality” as a predefined given. We, on the other hand, take a different stance i.e., that identity categories, such as “metrosexual,” are an “emergent feature” of social interactions (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Stokoe, 2003, 2010; West & Fenstermaker, 1993). From this perspective, identity is not presumed in advance of analysis; rather identities and identity characteristics only becomes relevant if the participants within the interaction make it so. In other words,

identity only becomes relevant for the interaction if the participants are orienting to identities and their features; if not, as Schegloff (1997) argues, analysts do not have grounds for making identity claims.

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

Our second aim is to contribute to the relatively underdeveloped field of studies on identities in online contexts. Some analysts (Epstein, 2007; Wiszniewski & Coyne, 2002) suggest that online identities are unreliable, since there is a greater potential for creating a “mask” (Wiszniewski and Coyne). Such views presume that it is much easier to create alternative identities in the absence of face-to-face visual and verbal cues associated with offline communications. Yet others (Coyle & MacWhannell, 2002; Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003) argue that computer-mediated communication creates the same “real” identities as those expressed in offline communications by relying on the same references to space, embodiment, time and shared experiences. For example, research on suicide forums (Horne & Wiggins, 2009), eating disorders (Winzelburg, 1997) and sexual abuse (Moursand, 1997) all showed similarities to offline identity construction via the disclosure of shared experiences, knowledge, meanings and positions with those who have membership entitlement within the same electronic space.

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

DATA

Our dataset is drawn from the premier Internet video publisher *YouTube* (Nielsen, 2009). Founded in February 2005, *YouTube* allows people to easily upload and share video clips on a range of topics including those claimed to be associated with men’s grooming such as “body hair removal,” “manicures,” “fashion and style,” “cosmetic application” and other similar activities. Since men’s cosmetic use, other than for TV,

fancy dress, drag and other such activities, is considered one of the more extreme forms of men's grooming (Harrison, 2008, p. 57), we selected one particular video that displayed a young man taking viewers through his daily makeup routine. This video was the most popular non-make-up artist tutorials, boasting a total of 30,133 views (and average of 35 a day since November 2008) along with 334 written comments (as of 03/05/11). Of those comments from self-identified cosmetic users, seven were particularly interesting for the ways in which they used makeup or accounted for makeup use by drawing on typical masculine markers such as heterosexual prowess.

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

A distinctive feature of ethnomethodology and conversation analytic inquiry is a commitment to the reproduction of materials, in order that fine grained analysis may be conducted in a way which provides the reader with access to the detail of the phenomena. (p. 124)

Although this has the potential to raise concerns over the veracity of our analysis, since we cannot reproduce the video in this paper for readers to see, this issue is avoided within this particular analytical inquiry since our focus of the research is directed to the written and reproducible comments of the viewers.

Following the British Psychological Society's *Guidelines for ethical practice in psychological research online* (2007), the relevant university approved ethics and Rodham and Gavin (2006), we anonymised the online talk by removing personal tags and replacing them with “video creator” (VC) and “respondent” (R1-7). We did this in order to avoid disclosing personal details since some respondents' and the video creator have hyperlinks to their own *YouTube* webpage. However, personal consent was not sought since our data is publically available and the majority of respondents provided no contact details. We present the extracts of talk in full as they appear on *YouTube* including spelling mistakes, colloquial language and other electronic forms of notation (e.g., underscores), albeit with the addition of line numbers for ease of analysis.

METHOD

In analyzing the electronic talk, we identified one main issue for the video creator and the respondents. The number of orientations to heterosexual status (“speaking as a straight guy”; “I'm METRO, NOT gay,” etc.), suggest a concern that cosmetic use might attract charges of homosexuality. In each example we analysed how the respondents worked up, orientated to, and managed their descriptions in relation to gendered norms and identities, identifying the significance of discursive phenomena such as list-

ing (Jefferson, 1991), extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), nonextreme generalizations (D. Edwards, 2000), greetings (Sacks, 1992) and so on. In combination with these conversation analytical insights we drew on Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992).

Sacks (1972a, 1972b, 1992) developed Membership Categorisation Analysis as a method for examining how people go about categorising and negotiating social identities. In his now well-cited example—“The baby cried. The mommy picked it up” (1992, p. 236)—Sacks suggests we hear the baby, as the baby of the mother, and do so because “mommy” and “baby” are categories that form part of a collection of categories (Membership Category Device) called “family.” Categories such as these are linked to particular actions (category-bound activities) and characteristics (category predicates), such that when “babies” cry, mommies comfort them. Although categories have these features, why, as Schegloff (2007, p. 469) puts it, “should one *care* all that much about these terms and their deployment?” One of the important features of categories is that they are “inference rich.” That is, they store huge amounts of culturally rich common-sense knowledge within them. If a person is categorized, that person is presumed to embody the common-sense knowledge about that category. However, if a person contravenes that knowledge, they may be seen as “an exception,” “different,” or “defective” category member (Schegloff, 2007, p. 469) and re-categorised (Speer, 2005). For example, as beautification is typically associated with women, men who beautify or “groom” (e.g., metrosexuals) are often considered either effeminate or “gay” (T. Edwards, 2003). It is these normative features of categories and the potential for re-categorisation that we focus on in our study.

ANALYSIS

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

The Original Post

VC

- 1 Hey
- 2 This video’s just basically my face routine that i go though almost
- 3 every morning.
- 4 Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup is because of acne and
- 5 some scaring and also redness.
- 6 No, my face is usually not as red as it was in the beginning of the
- 7 video; it was like that because i had exfoliated my face right before
- 8 turning on the cam.
- 9 Products used:
- 10 Eucerin- everyday protection face lotion SPF 30
- 11 Almay- Clear complexion concealer in “light 100”
- 12 -Clear complexion makeup in “Naked”

- 13 Covergirl- Clean fragrance free pressed powder in “250, Creamy
14 beige”
15 and some Covergirl sponges.
16 btw, I’m METRO, NOT gay!

The first thing to notice in this extract is VC’s choice of greeting, “Hey” (1.1). Sacks (1992, p. 4) identified a procedural rule for greetings, “... a person who speaks first ... can choose their form of address, and in choosing their form of address they can thereby choose the form of address the other uses.” In other words, exchanges tend to occur in pairs, so that if someone says “Hey,” the response will most likely be “Hey.” The use of a casual greeting “Hey” then sets the tone and context of this introductory text and video to be read and seen by the audience in a casual non-serious manner. The other thing to notice about VC’s use of “Hey” is that VC doesn’t choose to address anybody specifically. Given that VC could have opted for a range of other candidate greetings to address particular types of person e.g., “guys/girls” with the greeting “hey guys/girls,” or indeed none at all, all of which would not seem out of place, it is evident that VC’s expectation is that the video could possibly be viewed by anybody. Now the relevance of these preliminary observations becomes clearer when we examine the remainder of VC’s introductory text.

VC’s description of his video, “This video’s just basically my face routine that i go though almost every morning” (1.2-3) contains the downgrade “just basically.” Downgrades and upgrades—extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986)—are ways of referring to events and objects by invoking minimal or maximal properties. What this does is reduce the basis for others to search for an account. Pomerantz’s (pp. 219-220) work showed that people use extreme-case formulations in adversarial situations and when they anticipate others undermining their claims or to propose that some behaviour is not wrong (or is right) especially if it can be regarded as frequently occurring. Or, as Potter (1996, p. 61) points out, accounts are often provided for dispreferred actions, so that if an action is not the preferred action of the actor then a reason for such action may be required. Therefore, VCs use of “just basically” rather than saying “This video is my ...” in the description, proposes that VC “should not” have to offer an account for using makeup. However, VC does anticipate that some viewers may still need an account, and so provides a justification for his use of makeup use: “Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup is because of acne and some scaring and also redness” (1.4-5).

In providing such an account VC is signaling that his makeup use will “trouble” some viewers referenced specifically as “you” (1.4). “You,” as Sacks (1992, pp. 163-168) points out, simultaneously references both “you (you alone) or ‘you’ (you and others)” (p. 165). What this implies then, is that VC is directing the account at individual viewers as members of a category of people who may object to his makeup use. Although we cannot be sure what sort of category that is, VC’s response “... because of acne and some scaring and also redness” does imply that this category of people do not object to makeup use by men who use it to cover facial defects. Note also that this is a three-part list “acne,” “scaring” and “redness.” As Jefferson (1991) showed, the presence of three items on a list adds clarity and weight to arguments. In other words, strength by

numbers. Therefore, VC’s list helps support and strengthen his account in the presence of potential discord or criticism. VC’s response can therefore be read as an attempt to inoculate himself (Potter, 1996) from charges of wearing cosmetics for reasons other than to cover facial defects—presumably beautification. This is further grounded by the implication that this is a necessary daily procedure. However, although VC uses this tactic as a deterrent to ward off potential criticisms, he is careful to minimize the extent of his facial defects in his second pre-emptive response: “No, my face is usually not as red as it was in the beginning of the video; it was like that because i had exfoliated my face right before turning on the cam” (1.6-8). Such minimization works in two ways. Firstly, it avoids having to provide a further account for why VC has such skin problems (potentially from the use of cosmetics), and secondly, too much emphasis on skin defects risks excluding some viewers who do not have facial skin defects. Put simply, if a *YouTube* user wants to reach the widest possible audience, then narrowing the scope of the video limits that possibility.

Having attempted to avoid potential “trouble” so far, VC counters this possibility further in the list of the products used. What is immediately evident is that the list, which can be summarized as moisturizer, concealer, foundation and face powder, is limited in scope to coverage products rather than products for beautification, such as lipstick, eyeliner, mascara, rouge and so on. What’s also interesting is that these products are presented with pragmatic and technical features (e.g., “everyday protection,” “complexion concealer,” “fragrance free”), along with a throwaway reference to Covergirl sponges as if to sweep these beautification items under the carpet (see Harrison, 2008 for other examples of the masculinisation of makeup).

A final observation: VC self- categorises himself as “METRO,” but “NOT gay” (1.16). In doing so VC makes relevant the MCD (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b, 1992) “types of men.” Although in this collection, two types of men are explicitly stated—“metrosexual” and “gay”—VC’s disclaimers “Before you ask, the reason i wear makeup” (1.4) and “I’m ... NOT gay” imply another (unspoken) category of “men,” one whose members are neither gay nor makeup users. This sets up a first contrast pair (Smith, 1978) based on sexuality i.e., “straight/gay.” The MCD “heterosexual men” is also invoked, providing a second contrast pair centered on activity: “makeup user/non-makeup user.” Since VC also provided an account of the reason for using cosmetics we can see that the category ‘straight men’ with the activity ‘makeup use’ may become recategorised as “gay.”

Rather than risk being categorised as “gay,” VC preemptively categorises himself as “metrosexual.” Such an undertaking demonstrates how the conventional rules for applying categories, activities and predicates can be transformed and revised (Speer, 2005, p. 120), but also create new identity categories. In this undertaking VC also shows us one aspect of the parameters of this new identity category—heterosexual men who wear cosmetics can be categorised “metrosexual.” Of course, not all heterosexual men who wear cosmetics may warrant being categorized as “metrosexual” (e.g., fancy dress, TV personalities, movie stars on so on). Where the categorization of “metrosexual” becomes relevant can be seen by VC’s statement “This video’s just basically my face routine that i go though almost every morning” (1.2-3). This indicates that one of the category-features of “metrosexuality” is about straight men applying makeup “almost every morning” and not simply in a specific environment or context.

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

VIEWERS’ RESPONSES: EMPHASIZING DISCRETION

Respondent 1

17 Overall, good routine. I think that maybe a bit more countouring such as
 18 bringing out the tops of your cheek bones the middle of your nose and your
 19 chin and forehead would make it a more masculine look. and darkening under
 20 the cheekbones and on the sides of the nose and up to the inside of the
 21 eyebrow would make you look more chiseled. :) Maybe you wouldn’t want it
 22 that way though. :) glad I’m not the only dude who wears makeup

Constructive, but critical, assessments of people and objects can be received as offensive. So, those issuing constructive criticism must carefully manage the presentation of their assessment if they are to successfully get their point “over” without alienating the recipient. R1’s assessment of VC’s makeup regime does this in a number of ways. Firstly, it begins with the generalized comment, “Overall, good routine.” Words such as “overall,” “almost,” “mostly” and so on, are qualified, but weaker or softer versions of extreme-case formulations—nonextreme generalizations. D. Edwards (2000, p. 352) notes that words like “overall” are deployed instead of much stronger versions such as “every” and “all” because they are more robust to challenges. That is, they provide a space for some disagreement or difference. The “Overall” in R1’s initial response works to establish a positive ground for the critique to come. The use of positive nonextreme generalizations fit nicely with dispreferred responses, offering some kind of upshot or token appreciation before the negative tone of the response is mitigated (Kitzinger, 2000). R1 further softens the response with the personalized “I think” and with the use of “maybe” (1.17), which is then restated in the disclaimer “Maybe you wouldn’t want it that way though” (1.21-1.22) thus allowing that others, especially VC, may not agree. A visual dimension is also added to emphasis this point with the inclusion of smilies. Emoticons such as smilies are used in computer-mediated communication in the absence of non-verbal cues found in face-to-face communication. The poster may position an emoticon in text where they want the recipient to follow an emotional response, much like the insertion of laughter tracks by producers of television situation comedies where humour is not necessarily obvious (Provine, Spencer, & Mandell, 2007). In R1’s text the smilies can be seen to work as an attempt to elicit a positive emotional response

in the presence of the critique.

R1’s critical assessment of VC’s cosmetic application is divided into two parts. R1’s initial generalised prescription for ‘a more masculine look’ (1.19) centres on listing facial features: “cheek bones,” “nose,” “chin,” and “forehead” for “contouring.” The quantity and specificity of the named facial features for “contouring” in R1’s list add strength to his prescription (see Jefferson, 1991). But R1 is at pains to emphasize the point of a “masculine look,” and does so by reiterating, but this time with more specific detail on “contouring” to bring off the “masculine look,” except this time the “masculine look” is reformulated to “look more chiselled.” The reformulation here works to provide a candidate characteristic of how to identify the “masculine look,” but also strengthen R1’s critique that implies VC’s style of cosmetic application as potentially “less masculine.” R1’s orientation to gender suggests differentiation in the way wo/men “ought” to apply makeup and that there is the potential for “trouble” if such methods are not adhered to. This can be read in conjunction with VC’s introductory text that implied that makeup use by men can result in being categorized as “gay” rather than “metrosexual.”

Since the gender of respondents may be difficult to ascertain in electronic discourse due to anonymity with tags, the force of the prescription for the “masculine look” may be lessened if R1’s gender is not made relevant. In other words, VC may not take seriously R1’s prescription without a shared interest and identity. R1 concludes therefore, by self-categorising as “dude” (1.22) (a reference for “man” in North American youth subcultures) and also as makeup user (1.22). In aligning himself with VC and his activity suggests R1 is a fellow “metrosexual.” As Antaki and Widdicombe (1998, p. 5) note, identity categories are rarely “named out aloud.” Instead “metrosexual” is made relevant through indexing and occasioning. In other words, since R1 is a participant in the activity of discussing makeup use he may be indexed as “metrosexual” and occasioned by the context of the event procedures, e.g., how to apply makeup. Therefore, R1’s category, predicate and task (Hester & Eglin, 1997) i.e., “metrosexual” men applying makeup for a “more chiseled look,” presents as advice worked up for VC’s benefit.

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

Respondent 2

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

Unlike R1, R2’s response is a less restrained critique and this is noticeable from the outset with “you should try” (1.23) rather than “I think that maybe” (1.17). R2’s prescription is to use “mineral makeup” supported by a list of reasons to strengthen the pro-

motion of these products (Jefferson, 1991); it is discrete: “u just never! NEVER can tell that you wearing makeup” (l. 23-1.24), “it’s great for skin” (1.24) and “it’s less time consuming” (1.27). It’s evident from R2’s list that these reasons have unequal importance. Healthy skin and application time are secondary benefits signaled by the addition of “too” and an exclamation mark immediately after stating them. What is of primary importance for R2 is that wearing makeup is discrete, emphasized by capitalization “NEVER” and the use of the repeated extreme-case formulation “never! NEVER.” As we noted in our analysis of VC’s text, extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) strengthen accounts, especially in adversarial situations. R2’s use of “never! NEVER” implies “trouble” for “men” who wear makeup, given the context of the video is a man applying makeup.

As R2’s response provides advice—a cosmetic product that goes unnoticed—it could be argued that R2 is possibly a non-member who understands the issues for “men” using makeup, e.g., a wife whose husband was ridiculed by others when discovered wearing cosmetics. However, R2’s response is presented from a personal perspective “I recommend” (1.24), “I stared with” (1.25), “as I got better” and “I switched to” (1.26) (Goffman, 1981), further grounded in the way that R2 presents naivety or inexperience “as I got better” from starting with “mineral powder” to switching to “bare minerals,” implies R2 has a shared experience similar to VC’s. That is; learning to use makeup. This shared experience, occasioned also by discussing cosmetic use, indexes this response as a potential fellow category member, either specifically “metrosexual” or more generally “men who use makeup.” The significance of R2’s response is that it seems to demonstrate in-group support and understanding emphasised with a positive sign-off and mark for VC’s makeup tutorial “in any case, you did great! a+” (1.27).

Unlike R2’s response where the respondent’s identity is not “named out aloud” (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998), the following respondent immediately demonstrates shared experience and identity by invoking the informal term for the category man—“guy” and “like me”—in the context of “it’s nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup” (1.28).

Respondent 3

28 its nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup. I wear mine because I
29 have a mild form of rosacea¹. So along with the help of tanning, I use liquid
30 tan foundation and pressed bronzer power and concealer to make my face look
31 clear. People dont even realize i wear it.

Given VC’s self-identification as a “metrosexual,” R3’s shared identity as a makeup user (“it’s nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup”) suggests this respondent also aligns with a “metrosexual” identity. What R3’s response also implies that men wearing makeup is uncommon and hence a non-normative activity for men, since, at least for R3, this is not a frequent occurrence. R3’s orientation to gender: “another guy like me,” and non-normativity: “makeup user” suggests that R3 and VC are mem-

¹ Rosacea is a chronic condition characterized by facial erythema (redness).

bers of a marginalized or newly formed, perhaps even a heroic minority identity category. As we saw with the previous responses, this suggests that there could be “trouble” for members of this category in their non-conventional category-bound activities. R4 makes this explicit with his final statement: “People don’t even realize i wear it” (1.31). The significance of dissimulation is again underlined—makeup that is noticeable may draw gendered disapproval. Inoculation against potential charges of gender non-conformity is also produced via the invocation of a medical rationale explaining R3’s cosmetic use: “I wear mine because I have a mild form of rosacea” (1.28-29). In other words, his makeup regime can be treated as serving a pragmatic, protective function rather than for superficial beautification purposes. This is further underlined in R3’s choice of makeup: “liquid tan foundation,” “bronzer powder,” and “concealer,” along with “the help of tanning” (1.29-1.30), all of which are both coverage and beautification products rather than perhaps lipstick, eyeliner, mascara, rouge and so on, which are for beautification only.

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

INOCULATION DISCOURSE

Respondent 4

32 hey bro good shit im right there wit ya ... everymorning ...
33 my girlfriend loves having a guy who can look flawles :)
VC
34 Niceeee! aha
35 Girls love it_ actually
36 x]

R4’s street vernacular greeting “hey bro” (short for “hey brother”), like previous responses, immediately aligns R4 and VC as having a shared male identity, one which is centered on makeup use “im right there wit ya ... everymorning” (1.32). R4’s invocation of time and activity references him as “metrosexual” since, as we saw with VC’s text, one of the specified “metrosexual” category features was men’s daily use of makeup. What’s interesting is that R4 chose to use street vernacular rather than other informal styles (e.g., see R1, R2 and R3’s). In choosing this style of response, R4 is able to present, not only himself, but also other male makeup uses as “cool.” Presenting men who use cosmetics as “cool” implies that others may not agree, and spells the same potential gender “trouble” as noted in previous extracts. R4’s second tacit for dealing with “trouble” is by underlining a heterosexual benefit: “my girlfriend loves having a guy who can look flawles :)” (1.33). The reference to heterosexuality serves to dismiss any potential accusations of homosexuality and resultant recategorisation (Schegloff, 2007; Speer, 2005). Like VC’s introductory text, this indicates that makeup

use for men is often viewed as a category-feature of “gay men.” What’s also interesting is that R4 further strengthens his account by making relevant his girlfriend’s opinion. The use of this tactic allows some accountability for his actions to be deflected onto her, to the extent that she “loves” the “flawlessness” provided by his makeup use.

What is also interesting is that VC replied to R4’s response. In our dataset VC was the only poster frequently recategorised as “gay,” and he made several attempts to reject this positioning. In his response here: “Niceeee! Aha Girls love it_ actually x]” (1.34-36), VC recycles R5’s claim around women finding men who wear makeup attractive, thereby reiterating his own heterosexual status. In the next response, another poster uses quite a different tactic to reframe makeup use:

Respondent 5

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

R5’s opening “You know what” serves as a pre-announcement (Schegloff, 1988) for some statement to come. Yet before a statement is delivered, R5 immediately establishes his gender (“guy”) and sexual orientation (“straight”) (1.36). The category “guys” belongs to a collection of categories that includes “men,” “guys,” “lads,” etc., which stand in opposition to the collection of categories, partitioned on sex, such “girls” and “women” and so on (Sacks, 1992). “Straight,” on the other hand, is another term for “heterosexual” as part of a collection of categories for sexual preference. In making his credentials immediately relevant, R5 implies that the forthcoming statement may potentially be controversial, in that others may think it has originated from a non-heterosexual “guy.”

From a personalized perspective—“I think,” implying others may not agree—R5’s claim is that “make up is way over rated as being marketed toward girls only” (1. 36-1.37). Drawing on the extreme-case formulation “only” to support his assertion about the marketing of cosmetics nicely ties the activity of makeup as a normative feature of the category “girls.” The implication in R5’s statement is that this “female only” sex-based category feature “should” also be feature of the category “males.” However, in doing so, R5 is advocating that “guys” participate in a non-normative category-bound activity. Since the implied downside to this is potentially having one’s sexuality questioned (or recategorised: see Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007; Speer, 2005), R5 is obliged to provide an account for why he seems to advocate this.

R5’s account centers on what “today’s very judging society” (1. 39) expects of men. That is; “to be well groomed,” which “shows that they care about their body and they respect themselves” (1.37-1.38). Such an account summons discourses of choice, individuality and self-respect (see Gill, Henwood, & McLean, 2005 for interview research

on these as category predicates of masculinity), which are further conveyed in the culminating statement “if he wants to” (1.42). For those men who choose to wear makeup and groom—“eyebrows nicely groomed, hair styled daily”—dividends are realizable in the workspace: “Employers appreciate it when their employees are presentable,” which is presented as “fact.” Conversely, what R5’s account also implies, therefore, is that those men who choose not to “groom” may be negatively judged by society and less appreciated by employers. In doing so R5’s account also serves as defense against, and warning to, his potential adversaries.

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

Respondent 6

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

Although R6’s response opens with an emphasised compliment “nice one!!!” before self-identifying as a makeup user “i also use concealer and foundation,” what’s interesting is that, like R1, makeup is applied to enhance the “masculine look” by contouring: “also like to contour” (1.44). As with previous responses, R6’s heterosexuality is made explicit. This is achieved by self-ascribing “we” as a co-member of the category “straight men.” As we saw with other responses, naming one’s heterosexual credentials serves to inoculate against potential charges of “homosexuality.” In doing so, R6, like VC, R4 and R5, points to a social expectation which presumes that men who wear cosmetics (other than for theatrical reasons) are “gay.” Given the implication of this social norm, self-categorising as “straight” doesn’t mean one won’t have to provide an account for non-conformity. R6’s account centers on presenting men’s makeup use as a “need” in order to combat the impact of “harsh sun and windy winter” (1.45-1.46). Like other responses (e.g., R3), R6’s cosmetic use serves a pragmatic, protective function rather than for beautification. This formulation works to deflect some accountability for makeup use in the sense that “men in Sydney Australia” at least, may “need to” wear makeup rather than “choosing to.” R6 further inoculates himself against being recategorised as “gay” by stating as fact “I know” that “some” (1.46) NRL (National Rugby League) players wear makeup. In doing so, R6 nicely ties makeup use as a conventionally masculine activity.

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

Respondent 7

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

R7's response "same here" acknowledges facing a similar situation to a response posted by another self-ascribed teenage "metrosexual," who comments on how his best friend calls him "gay" because he spends 10 minutes a day in front of the mirror applying cosmetics. It is clear from R7's initial response that he shares the same membership experience of being categorized as "gay" instead of "metrosexual" for doing "make up everyday to school" (1.47). What is different and interesting about R7's response is that way in which he does makeup and grooming to position himself against another category of men: "men = smelly, ugly, hairy?" (1.49). R7's three-part list (Jefferson, 1991) of category-predicates for these men, sets up a contrast pair of categories (Smith, 1978): "men who groom/men who don't groom." In doing so, R7 is able to critique this category of men "jus [sic] plain stupid" and "fuck that shit," but also masculinise "metrosexual" cosmetics use and grooming in general, by implying that men who don't participate lack self-respect and are outmoded.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper used a discursive approach to analysis, incorporating aspects of membership categorization analysis, to engage with men's own accounts for their use of cosmetics. We provided seven extracts to examine how explicitly self-identified and implicitly referenced "metrosexuals" reframed their non-normative activity in this respect. Some of these posts centered on reframing men's cosmetic use for health, hygiene and repair work (e.g., to cover skin defects) rather than for beautification concerns. Other posters reproduced notions of heterosexual prowess and self-respect, as well as protection against hostile environments. What was particularly interesting in two responses (R1, R6) was that cosmetics were presented in terms of rendering men more masculine by emphasising the contours of the face, particularly the nose, cheekbones and the chin. However, such non-typical masculine practices, if visible, run the risk of being held accountable. We saw also that most were centered on discretion in light of the potential for users to be recategorised (Speer, 2005) as "gay" rather than "metrosexual." What was clear from these accounts is that makeup use by "straight" men is still regarded as non-normative since, as the respondents suggest, it is conventionally either associated with "girls" or "gay men." As Sacks (1972a, 1972b, 1992) and Schegloff (2007) have pointed out, those who are seen to be non-normative are often declared "phony" or "defective," respectively.

Our analysis shows how the practices of newly forming categories such as "metrosexual" are important to study if we are to gain a greater understanding of how identity categories regulate practices and engender difficulties for those who appear to challenge conventional gendered binaries. Such difficulties indicate that it is too early to state that contemporary hetero-masculinities are being superseded or are in crisis

(see MacInnes, 2001). Indeed, like two other studies on “metrosexuality” in other on-line contexts (Hall & Gough, 2011; Hall, Gough & Hansen, 2012), our findings suggest that conventional masculinities are not in decline, but are merely being reworked and repackaged in a more image-conscious consumer-oriented society. However, we are cautious about making generalizations about this since the scope of these studies is restricted to English-speaking Western computer-mediated communication forms. Therefore, further work is required in non-Western and non-English speaking contexts. Further work is also required if we are to understand the significance of “metrosexuality” for men, masculinities and sexualities. For example, as yet we know little about how other ‘metrosexual’ practices (e.g., “manscaping”²) are constructed and negotiated in online and offline contexts. We also know little of how self-identified “metrosexuals” negotiate their identities in face-to-face contexts. It would also be interesting to study other contemporary masculine categories such as “ubersexual” or “Eurosexual” (see Salzman, Matathia, & O’Reilly, 2005), and these would help to further extend our understanding of the meaning and breadth of contemporary men, masculinities and sexualities. There is also scope to extend “metrosexual” analyses to women. In 2010 Simpson and Hagood coined the term “Wo-Metrosexuality” to account for the increasing number of women “adopting or aspiring to some degree to the hedonistic metropolitan lifestyle” (Hagood, 2010, p. 1). Investigating fe/male “metrosexuality”—or any other contemporary gender identity category—affords gender scholars important and fascinating research phenomena.

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² “Manscaping” refers to men removing in full, or in part, body hair from regions such as the eyebrows, eyelashes, armpits, pubic region, legs, abdomen, chest and back.

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