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Empirical Paper

"There's Plenty More Clunge in the Sea": Boyhood Masculinities and Sexual Talk

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Jessica Clark[1]

Abstract

This article sets out to analyze the dominant sexual discourses embedded and negotiated within the television sitcom *The Inbetweeners*. Sex is a highly visible element of the program, marking it as a prevailing feature of the life of the teenage boy, paradoxically natural yet problematic. The performances draw upon and reproduce governing discourses of sexuality and gender. Of the potential themes, three are considered here. First, sex is represented as ubiquitous within the boys' narratives, an assumed attribute of (the transition to) the performance of successful adult masculinity. Second, individual (hetero) sexuality is policed through peer-led homophobic banter and humor. Third, girls are objectified by boys, demonstrating the role of gendered relations in the governance of femininity and the discursive sanctions, which define masculinity through objects of desire. This article reveals some of the sexual subjecthoods made available to young men through televised representation, and considers their position within the wider sexual landscapes of boyhood.

Keywords

boyhoods, masculinities, sexuality, gender, sitcom

Introduction

The exploration of girls, girlhoods, and femininities in relation to sex and sexualization in contemporary cultures is extensive (e.g., Duschinsky, 2013; Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Kehily, 2012; Renold & Ringrose, 2011). However, discussions that theorize and consider these issues in relation to boys, boyhoods, and masculinities are much thinner on the ground (Buckingham, Willett, Bragg, & Russell, 2010). The need for further consideration of young men and boyhood masculinities notably greater attention to sex, sexuality, and sexualization in relation to boys has been highlighted (Clark, 2013, 2014; Garner, 2012). There is a very small amount of work which attempts to further these discussions (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Bragg, 2015; Clark & Duschinsky, 2018; Pascoe, 2005). This article responds to this lacuna and to calls to pay more attention to boyhood sexual subjectivities. To interrogate what it means to "do boy" (Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2001) and the ways on offer of being a man in contemporary cultures (Garner, 2012). Here, the positioning of boys as sexual subjects is explicitly considered through an examination of their representation in a U.K. "young adult" television sitcom.

The Inbetweeners is a television sitcom, aimed at a young adult audience, which ran for three series (2008-2011) on the U.K. digital channel E4 (a sister station to mainstream broadcaster Channel 4 with a remit to produce and air programming aimed at a young adult audience). It achieved the highest audience ratings for the channel since its inception and received numerous awards including BAFTAs (British Academy Film and Television Award), British Comedy Awards and the Rose D'Or. A successful feature length film *The Inbetweeners* opened in U.K. box offices in the summer of 2011, an adapted U.S. version of the sitcom aired on MTV in summer 2012 and a second feature film *The Inbetweeners 2* released in the United Kingdom in the autumn of 2014. Many of the phrases from the series entered into wider popular culture and everyday language, spawning memes, and merchandise of "in-jokes."

The four central characters of *The Inbetweeners* are described by the program makers as a "bunch of middle class lads" ("The Inbetweeners: About the Series," 2014) aged 16 when the first series begins and 18 years old, finishing compulsory schooling, when we leave them at the end of Series 3. The two films document a postcollege party holiday in Europe and a period of traveling in Australia. *The Inbetweeners* charts the everyday calamities and conversations of Simon, Jay, Will, and Neil and is explained by the writers in their publication of the series' script-book, as attempting to tap into some of the universals of the adolescent experience (Beesley & Morris, 2012). As such,

[1]University of Suffolk, Ipswich, UK

Corresponding Author:
Jessica Clark, School of Psychology and Education, University of Suffolk, Ipswich IP4 1QJ, UK.
Email: jessica.clark@uos.ac.uk

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episodes are loosely structured around what are pitched as seminal yet common moments in the lives of the boys. These include taking a driving test, the school Christmas party, examinations, camping, theme parks, school trips, "bunking off," and work experience. Among this focus on supposed "universals" of the (middle class, suburban, White, heterosexual) experience of boyhood adolescence, what is immediately clear is the ubiquitous presence of sex; this is the focus of the analysis presented here. There are explorations that can be made regarding social class, place and space, race and ethnicity, the construction of adulthood, and parenting and family life (and the intersectional elements of some of these are attended to). However, this article focuses on the positioning of the four central characters as sexual subjects and considers how through visual imagery, dialogue, humor, storytelling, and the representation of relationships, sex is constructed as constant, desirable, and heterosexual. Sex and sexual authority are key markers of transition to full and successful (adult) masculinity.

Televised representations of social landscapes can be viewed as rhetorical frames that "shape people's perceptions of the world" (Myers, 2012, p. 127). Television's immediacy results in its drawing upon and dramatizing contemporary social and political issues (Arthurs, 2004), and such texts are argued to shape young people's identities (Buckingham et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2004). Willis (2003) in fact identifies popular culture as more important than schooling in young people's everyday lives. With such an acknowledgment comes the recognition that an analysis of how masculine status is portrayed via televisual medium offers the potential to uncover the kind of discursive figures and as such, subjecthoods (perhaps best explained as the state of being a "subject") made available to boys and young men in the practice and performance of masculinity. This is not to say that young people passively receive media content and messages in a universal unchallenging way, or that such programming is a simple reflection of some objective reality. Rather representations of particular subjects both offer and close down potential ways of being in the world which are a significant part of understanding the boyhood experience.

Exploring *The Inbetweeners*

The analysis undertaken of *The Inbetweeners* franchise is best described as Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA; as defined by Carrabine, 2001). The concept of discourse can be defined as "sets of statements that construct objects . . . and an array of subject positions" (Parker, 1994, p. 245). FDA is particularly useful in this regard due to its specific focus on the role of discourse in wider social processes of legitimation and power. As the ways of speaking about a topic cohere, they establish the truth or truths of a particular moment. Particular subject positions are made available from which individuals are able to speak or act. In a constant state of flux, these are contested and negotiated, and operate by offering or restricting opportunities for action (Clark, 2013).

In a similar way to Driscoll's (2011) approach to exploring teen film, this article focuses on the discursive rather than the aesthetic. This does not mean that aesthetic or stylistic issues are ignored, rather that the focus here is not on processes of cinematic production, direction, or editing but on the discourses that are embedded within the characters, the images, the dialogue and the performance as seen on screen. For these purposes text, and its analysis, are defined broadly:

> text designates not only coherent and complete series of linguistic statements, whether oral or written, but also use every unit of discourse . . . an image . . . a sculpture, a film, a musical passage . . . constitute texts . . . even the units known as performances can be considered as texts and can thus become the object of textual analysis. (De Marinis, 1993, p. 47)

Such texts are considered, in line with Vanska's (2011, 2012) work on childhood, sex, and fashion, as feeding into wider cultural processes that construct certain subjectivities through gazing. Such images produce meaning, which allows individuals to make sense of experiences such as childhood, and/or gendered positions. They function as fields of production and reproduction. Television sitcom and other cultural products such as advertising or fashion, for example, participate in wider processes of the identity formation of subjects in contemporary cultures (Vanska, 2012). De Lauretis's (1994 in Vanska, 2012) seminal work in this field positions images as social technologies of gender which normalize particular gender positions. Here, *The Inbetweeners* can be considered as cultural imagery, which provides information on and participates in the construction of gendered and sexed identities. Thus, representations of gendered and sexual subjects not only reflect but also produce our sense of real (Cook, 2004). This is not to say that such cultural texts are one-directional, permanent, and only responded to by audiences in a linear and discursively conventional fashion. Boys and girls can and do talk back to media productions, the fashion industry, and indeed all elements of the culture within which they are located. Such cultural products are not "straightjackets from which there is little escape for living subjects" (Hunter, 2012, p. 4). They do, however, provide opportunities for action and identity formation or indeed close down such activities. They are thus worthy of analysis, here through the use of FDA, to better understand the positions made available to boys and girls as gendered and sexual beings.

Discourses constructed within the text have been identified through FDA, by viewing and reviewing the character portrayals of Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will and their position within the wider narratives of *The Inbetweeners*. Identifying the positioning of sex in relation to masculinity and boyhood means light is shed upon the sanctioned ways made available to "do" adolescence and masculinity, and to "be" a boy and a

sexual being. Of the potential themes, three are examined here. First, sex is ubiquitous and thus marked as a key feature of the life of the teenage boy. Second, successful masculinity is represented as depending on the performance of heterosexuality through sexual action and talk, and this is heavily policed through peer-led banter focused on homosexuality and femininity. Third, heterosexuality as the default approved sexual subjecthood for young men results in the positioning of women not ever as part of a platonic relationship but with the constant potential (if she is performing the "right kind of girl") for sexual activity and/or objectification. This in itself also functions to govern the boys own performance; their masculinity appraised by the object of their desire.

Sex as Everywhere, Always, and Innate

The supposed "universals" of the boyhood experience are part of a loose structure to the episodes of *The Inbetweeners* and this can be gleaned by the episode titles "Bunk Off" (S1, E2) or "The Field Trip" (S2, E1). Such titles are innocuous, referring to the central focus of that particular show, their focus usually structured around events within the boys' schooling. This in itself documents the importance of education in the structuring of young people's lives (Christensen & James, 2001). Beyond this focus on educational, spatial and temporal environments, it is immediately and consistently clear that sex, sexuality, and sexual experiences (real and fictional) are a dominant part of every single episode. Sex features as part of the development of subplots that crisscross through and across series, for example, Simon's (long standing) crush on family friend Carli or as part of one-off episodes, for example, when Jay gets a (short-lived) girlfriend (S2, E6). The significance in singular and multiple episode plot lines means that sex makes it into almost all of the conversations that the boys have. The sexual content is diverse within these performances, ranging from homophobic banter about the activities and appearance of Neil's dad (see, for example, S1, E2), constant reference to masturbation as both natural and subject to extensive peer discussion (see, for example, S2, E3), and to the theme park visit they embark upon (S1, E3). It turns out this episode is not about theme park rides at all, but rather "them little lovelies on the teacup rides . . . with their tits and that." Sex, in short, permeates all aspects of the boys' lives.

Sex and sexuality are conceptualized as key sites where individuals "become" masculine (Allen, 2003). Explorations of hegemonic ideals of masculinity position sexual knowledge, activity and a constant state of readiness as key elements attributed to the successful performance of masculinity (see, for example, Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Jackson, 2006). Imagery of the naturally strong, voracious, unbridled, and virile sexual masculine subject is powerfully pervasive (Phoenix & Frosh, 2001) and exists as a signifier of ideal masculinity throughout *The Inbetweeners*. Garner (2012) calls for increasing attention to the ways that are on offer of being a man in contemporary cultures and a significant element of this should concern cultural imagery and commodities. Here, what can be seen is that crucial to the performance of successful young masculinity is the performance of a (hetero)sexual being who is sexually knowledgeable, active, and authoritative.

The Inbetweeners sitcom participates in the construction of a discursive space of young male sexuality and the focus on adolescence, rather than boyhoods in earlier childhood, mitigates it becoming subject to public concerns regarding childhood sexuality. There are examples of public furors around the purportedly "sexualized" representation of young boys. An excellent example being the 1990s Calvin Klein advertising campaign explored by Vanska (2011). This, very quickly canceled, campaign featured a black and white image of two young boys in Calvin Klein underwear (a pair of white boxers and white briefs) jumping and playing on a sofa. Concerns were raised about the sexual representation of these boys, still constructed as being contained within the discursive domain of early childhood. Particular attention was paid to the boy in the white briefs and the potential visibility of the outline of his penis (Vanska, 2011). The public reaction to this imagery clearly demonstrates that anxieties around the sexualization of childhood are not just directed at girls, but do of course transcend to the fashion, deportment, and representation of boys. This does suggest a change in the way the bodies of boys are seen, understood, and assigned meanings (Vanska, 2011). Young boys are, like girls, readily thought of as sexually vulnerable and thus must work within the boundaries that signify innocence. I contend here, as elsewhere (Clark & Duschinsky, 2018), that this shifts beyond early childhood. After middle childhood, boys have no need to be encouraged to "invest" in innocence rather than "spend" on their sexual identity (Clark & Duschinsky, 2018). This is because adult masculinity is already presumed to contain heterosexual desire. Therefore, the presence of sex in the lives of boys who are occupying the transitional space of adolescence does not produce the same social, moral, and political concern as has been expressed about girls. *The Inbetweeners* as a cultural product is thus to some extent socially sanctioned as a result of the discursive positioning of sex as natural and innate for the adult male. The discursive positioning of age as a marker of development means that for the teenage boy (hetero)sex is, both sanctioned but, actually socially necessary in the development of successful adult masculinity.

Despite sex being pervasive, the central male characters in *The Inbetweeners* do not embody the successful masculine subject, rather they exhibit a kind of heterosexual fumbling. Representations of the coming of age narrative, which can be traced in U.S. teen film from *Porky's* to *American Pie* is considered a significant part of the rise of the "sex comedy" as a genre (Bernstein, 1997). Such narratives appear to actually subvert dominant images of hegemonic masculinity with clumsy, sexually inexperienced male lead characters

set alongside sexually aware, agentic young women. This is a potential reading of the texts of *The Inbetweeners* and has been applied to other teenage sex comedies aimed at a young male audience; for example, Pearce's (2003) analysis of the U.S. film *American Pie* (1999). Pearce (2003) considered the sexual fumblings of young male characters to be insubordinate performances, which challenge dominant images of masculinity produced in the hegemonic field of signification, which regulates the production of sex, gender, and desire. Pearce (2006), however, revised her analysis on the furthering of the *American Pie* film franchise with the release of, what was thought of at the time as, the final installment *American Pie: The Wedding* (2003). Considering the development of the franchise as a collection of texts Pearce (2006) followed Kidd's (2004) exploration of adolescent vulnerability as a standard theme in teen films and as such she reversed her perspective. Pearce (2006) concluded that the franchise is not subversive, but represents a firmly conservative position, idealizing and maintaining heterosexuality and the nuclear family, with merely a veneer of radical sexism.

In a similar way to American Pie, *The Inbetweeners* is structured around "the horny awkward boy [in] . . . close encounters with the opposite sex" (Kidd, 2004, p. 101) that is characteristic of the sex comedy, coming-of-age genre. The heterosexual fumbling of the boys offers a potential reading, as highlighted above, of their characters as subverting dominant imagery of what it means to successfully do "boy" or "young man." This article suggests an alternative view, akin to that of Kidd (2004) and Pearce (2006), arguing that the comedic value of such failings suggests the audience is painfully aware of the shortcomings of the boys in their pursuit of successful sex. Will fails to lose his virginity with the "gorgeous" Charlotte because when given the opportunity he is unable to demonstrate sufficient sexual knowledge instead "bouncing around on Charlotte's stomach" (S1, E4). Indeed the boys self-described "disappointing" status as virgins is made clear in the first 5 min of Episode 1. By laughing at Will, and the other boys in their sexual failures the signifiers of ideal masculinity remain intact.

In addition, the boys are positioned against other minor male characters who serve as their "love rivals." These characters embody many of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity identified previously, that Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will lack. Tom is Carli's boyfriend and is set in contrast to Simon who has a long-standing crush on Carli. Donovan is Charlotte's on and off again boyfriend, with whom Will must compete for her attention. Both Tom and Donovan are muscular in physical stature, both have no problem being served alcohol while under the legal age and crucially, both are sexually knowledgeable and experienced. The masculine subject thus remains idealized as naturally and constantly sexual. Therefore, although possible to read *The Inbetweeners* as subverting dominant gender and sexuality norms, this is far from a revolutionary text. Any transgressions the characters exhibit are swiftly punished often with comedic value thus reinforcing the social order of approved masculine (hetero) sex and sexual desire.

Heteronormativity and Homophobia

Barnes (2012) identifies schoolboy humor as crucial to the construction and maintenance of power in male friendship groups. Humor, as discussed in the previous section of this article functioned to allow the boys to exhibit less than ideal performances without troubling the discursive motif of masculinity. The use of everyday peer-led banter permeates the representation of young men in *The Inbetweeners* and relates almost entirely to sex, sexuality, and gendered performances. One of the group jumps upon the boys immediately when they exhibit behavior or talk that is perceived as homosexual, or most notably feminized, as indicated in the extract below (S1, E6):

> Simon: You know I get breathless every time I think of her and I see her, my heart does little flips.
>
> Jay: Are you bent?
>
> Simon: Shut up!
>
> Jay: It's just that right then you sounded really, really bent.

In the above dialogue, Simon is denigrated as *homosexual*, the term used in a derogatory fashion, for expressing feminized, emotional feelings, even when they are aimed at the "appropriate" opposite sex. Here humor is used to police and maintain the boundaries of acceptable masculinity. The terms *gay* and *bent*, when used in this context, can certainly be characterized as derogatory but the joke is not directly aiming to denigrate homosexuality as legitimate identity, Simon is after all expressing heterosexual affection and desire. The joke actually pinpoints an overt display of femininity (linked of course to sexuality within the heterosexual matrix; Butler, 1993). This "feminine" performance is at odds with hegemonic masculine ideals. Following the work of Plummer (2001) and Pascoe (2005) to only analyze terminology such as *bent* or *fag* as homophobic obscures the gendered nature of sexualized insults and language. As articulated in the previous section, we are encouraged to laugh at the failings of Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will and in doing so, we reinforce the culturally exalted position of hegemonic masculinity (Barnes, 2012) and reify its signifiers. A key part of successful masculinity is heterosexuality and homophobia (Francis & Skelton, 2005). Full masculine status is separate from homosexual and crucially feminine identities, which speaks to a wider conflation of sex with gender (Nayak & Kehily, 2008) in the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1993). Here, what is revealed, as Pascoe (2005) argues, is that it is not so simple as to argue that there are "homosexual boys and heterosexual boys and the homosexual ones are marginalized" (p. 332). Rather, what can be seen is the myriad ways in which sexuality in part

constitutes gender. As such, displays in *The Inbetweeners* of comedy based on homosexuality are not solely about the denigration of homosexual desire or static homosexual identities, but rather about feminized performances that are fluid and identified periodically as sitting outside of the discursive construction of ideal hegemonic masculinity.

Various signifiers in *The Inbetweeners* mark an individual, activity, or object as "gay," ranging from the small denim shorts that Neil's dad wears to do the gardening (S1, E2) to the whiskey liquor Will buys when the boys bunk off school (S1, E2). Commodities such as dress and food presume the production of social statuses, identities, and images (Cook, 2004). In *The Inbetweeners* these are diverse and the phrase "gay" is used consistently as an insult within peer banter aimed not often directly at an expression of homosexual desire but at the performance or display of feminized attributes, behavior, and commodities. In wider academic research, boys are identified as themselves complicit in policing heterosexuality as a central component of successful masculinity (Connell, 2000) and this is certainly the case here. Phoenix and Frosh's (2001) research identifies anxiety about being gay or effeminate as central to why boys attempt not to stray far from the masculine ideal and risk being labeled as failed subjects. What is also noticeable, however, is how male friendships here are clearly valued in the lives of the boys. They are more than willing in particular circumstances to engage in physical touching to offer emotional support—for example, when Jay experiences a relationship break up (S2, E6). They are also willing to sleep close together in a small tent (S3, E6) without any humor based on homosexual desire or action. This points to the work of both Anderson and McCormack (2016) on inclusive masculinity, whereby they argue that contemporary young masculinities and male peer relationships are beginning to be less characterized by homophobia and involve increasing physical touch and emotional openness. Although the reading of *The Inbetweeners* presented here argues that homophobic banter (indicative of both sexual and gendered discourses) continues to play a crucial role in the performance and negotiation of young masculinities, there is also some evidence that homosocial tactility (Anderson, 2009) and emotional openness do characterize some elements of male teenage friendships. As such, the ways in which the performance of gendered and sexual identities within the maintenance and negotiation of peer relations should be recognized as fluid, complex, and situational; and the role representations in popular culture may play within this, should receive greater attention within the academy. In addition, it is worth noting the need to consider intersectional aspects of the boyhood experience. I have previously argued (see Clark & Duschinsky, 2008) that masculinities and explorations of boyhood sexuality are intricately intertwined with other aspects of subjects' identities. Whether this is class (see Anderson, 2009), sexual identity (see Cole, 2011), race (see Pascoe, 2007), or disability (see Ostrander, 2008). For example, Pascoe (2007) points to the importance of race and its intersection with gender in designation of interest in fashion as normative or subject to sanctions. For young White men in Pascoe's research in U.S. high schools, interest in appearance resulted in the questioning of a subjects sexuality and/or masculinity. However, discourses of male sexuality are highly racialized and careful attention to dress was a signifier of successful hegemonic masculinity for young African American men (Pascoe, 2007). Despite this awareness, there is limited opportunity to consider the intersectional aspects of contemporary masculinity in *The Inbetweeners*. The four central characters, although shown to have different interests, career aspirations, and family formations, are positioned as homogeneous; firmly White, middle class, "able-bodied," and suburban. This lack of attention to diversity does in itself reify a homogeneous model of masculinity that fails to take into account race, class, religion, and disability, and presents a model of heterosexuality as the default identity for masculine subjects.

As highlighted above, the focus of the jokes, which make both overt and implicit references to homosexuality is about the expression of homosexual desire, but is perhaps more so, about feminized performances. These often involve displays of vulnerability, at odds with the emotionally controlled, objective, active, neoliberal agency attributed to adult males (Edwards, 2006). Consider the examples presented thus far: Neil's dad's tiny shorts refer to existing cultural imagery surrounding gender, sexuality, and dress (see Cole, 2014; Entwistle, 2000) and Simon has displayed his emotions for his "crush." In addition, Jay has offered strong "protection" of his girlfriend from peer group sexual banter (S2, E6, discussed in more detail shortly), showing a performance of feeling so out of the ordinary, it immediately signifies cautious exchanges among the group and an air of seriousness descends. In *The Inbetweeners*, it is thus a feminized performance, rather than a homosexual one, which denotes the potential failure of a masculine subject.

". . . and Wait for the Gash Form an Orderly Queue": Boys Talking About Girls

The positioning of girls in *The Inbetweeners* sitcom and two subsequent films is inherently contradictory. Despite the boys sexual fumblings with attractive and sexually active female subjects the position of women is on the surface one of objectification. Throughout women and girls occupy not positions of equals within platonic relationships but instead are either the objects of crushes and girlfriends or they are siblings and mothers. They are judged on their appearance and often referred to by slang terms for their body parts including *gash, clunge*, and *jugs* to cite just a few. In the example below (S1, E4), Jay and Neil discuss Will's potential love interest, Charlotte Hinchcliff:

> Jay: Ahh, I'd make her come, all over my face. You know she has to get special bras made because not only are her tits so big, but they are perfectly round.
>
> Neil: Like porn star tits.
>
> Jay: And she's a slag. She once munched off the whole rugby team.

As identified previously homophobia has been generally considered a central tenet of hegemonic masculinity and this has also been the case of misogyny (Francis & Skelton, 2005). What girls are considered as being able to offer to these boys is sexual gratification and the prospect of satisfying the (hetero)sexual desire considered innate in the adolescent boy. Consider, for example, the popular and frequently used *Inbetweeners*' phrase "clunge magnet" (see, for example, S3, E3). *Clunge* is a slang term used most frequently by the character Jay to refer to female genitalia. Making explicit and sexual reference to female genitalia over and above other attributes of girls is as an objectifying process. The positioning of television comedy marketed at a young adult audience is one where the viewer is encouraged to share the male characters' viewing position and this objectification risks young women becoming sexualized erotic subjects existing merely as recipients of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975).

However, here, as with the previous discussions of humor and homosexuality, the reading of this imagery is far from straightforward. Although the above discussion stands, girls are objectified and sexualized, on continued viewing and reviewing what emerges are additional readings and potential ways of understanding boys objectifying talk beyond the problematic positioning of the adult male as biologically, innately misogynistic. Just as girls' performances are policed against the criterion of femininity (see Duschinsky, 2013), boys' performances are also governed and negotiated in the context of dominant discourses of gender and sexuality (see Plummer, 2001). In a wider cultural framework, where emotional expression among boys remains somewhat of a taboo, a female attribute at odds with the ideal motif of adult masculinity, girls' bodies and their sexuality may not just be "fair game" in a patriarchal, hypersexual, or misogynistic society. This may be a mechanism by which feelings, emotions, and desires can be expressed by boys in the emerging (heterosexual) romantic relationships of adolescent boyhood. If boys are not permitted to share their feelings of love, respect, and desire for girls in emotional language for fear of being cast as effeminate (a problem in itself of course) then how should they talk about girls? Consider, for example, the character of Jay, consistently in all episodes telling exaggerated stories of sexual conquests in graphic detail. However, these stories are often unmasked as untrue and as a cover for fears, anxieties, sadness, joy, and love. In dealing with the breakup of his relationship to Chloe, at her instigation (S2 E6), Jay tearfully shouts at his friends ". . . alright, she did break up with me, but it was because my cock was too big." Here, we see that sexual bravado remains if only as an attempted cover for such emotional talk in a subjects struggle to maintain a performance in line with ideal adult masculine (hetero)sexuality. This argument is not intended to justify chauvinism, misogyny, or the objectification or mistreatment of women and girls and there are concerns to be raised for both boys and girls of such language and the views of women that it potentially belies. Misogyny, chauvinism, and sexism are to be rightfully condemned but in a social context where male sexual behavior is currently being debated as deeply problematic, for example, the current campaign regarding sexual abuse that surrounds the phrase #metoo (Shugerman, 2017), more work needs to take place to understand the complexity of expressions of masculine sexuality. This article does not wish to fall in line with assumptions that all boys and men are sexist and wish to objectify or potentially predate upon women and girls (see Clark & Duschinsky, 2018) as this perspective is just as problematic. Rather here, I wish to begin what will hopefully be a wider process of more sustained academic analysis to attempt to understand misogynistic, objectifying behavior among young men, both in everyday encounters and in popular culture representations. The divorcing of male sexuality from emotional expression is identified as appropriately "masculine" in line with hegemonic ideals but is identified as risking the impoverishment of men's emotional and sexual ontologies (Edwards, 2006). Objectifying talk does not just objectify the subjects it is directed at, it also plays a part in the discursive construction of the subjects doing the talking. The consequences of acknowledging this regulation of boyhood romantic and sexual talk allows a reconceptualization of boys and men as not merely naturally sexual subjects, innately misogynistic and homophobic but as heavily constrained, by intersecting discourses of gender and sexuality.

The active male is set against the passive female in the discursive ideals highlighted in the previous paragraph. This is actually in direct contrast to the surface level presentation of many of the female characters in *The Inbetweeners* who are constructed as sexually active and knowledgeable young women. This obvious presentation, previously praised as subverting dominant ideals in other teen representations (Pearce, 2003), masks an innate passivity in the expression of female sexual desire. Charlotte, for example, enjoys making Will uncomfortable with small stories and comments of her sexual prowess and interests (S1, E4). This ranges from how many sexual partners she has had to exploits with her friends and sex toys. However, when Will accepts Charlotte's invite to her house for the overt purpose of sex, she lays back passively on her bed as he attempts to engage in sexual relations with her. After a short and awkward scene, the encounter ends with her pushing him off in frustration and declaring him a virgin. Will's anxiety and lack of sexual knowledge is clear but Charlotte does not take the lead, she displays little agency or positive action within the physical acts of foreplay and sex itself. What is demonstrated here is the pressure to

perform from within particular discourses. As Butler (1993) argues, certain discursive configurations become dominant reifying cultural differences in gender and rendering them natural and inevitable—"identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1993, p. 25). In the scene with Will and Charlotte outlined above, both assume their culturally designated positions as gendered beings within the dichotomy of active/passive. Thereby, what is assumed as natural is actually created and reified though a performance where the satisfaction of feminine desires is not generated through action of the female subject who must remain passive, but is in fact the responsibility of the actively sexual boy.

Female characters are readily identified when they are not considered to embody and perform the "right" kind of femininity. For example, when Will is paired up on an impromptu blind double date with Kerry (a girl known to the group through Simon's short-lived girlfriend Tara), he does not want to engage with her sexually because she is significantly taller than him (S3, E3). Despite encouragement from the others (that she has engaged sexually with other boys and is therefore a "sure thing"), Will is extremely resistant to such a possibility and this is attributed to the fact that her physicality strays from the feminine ideal. When it is revealed that he kissed her, Jay jokes about the physical possibility of this as Will refers to her as the Empire State Building. Another example can be found in the first *The Inbetweeners* film where Jay meets Jane, who is immediately labeled as the "fat girl." She is at one point publicly highlighted as such through insults shouted by male strangers on the street. These insults were not directly aimed at Jane but rather at Jay for engaging with a less than ideal girl. Part of his character's narrative in this particular film is constructed around him wrestling with and realizing his desire for Jane despite her transgressions of the physical embodied ideal for young women (Gill, 2009). These examples demonstrate not only that femininity is policed through such imagery and performances but also that such everyday talk about female subjects informs our understanding of masculine sexuality itself. As Butler (1993) argues, sex generates gender which in turn generates desire. This can be seen in the performances within *The Inbetweeners*, whereby the objects of male desire themselves function as signifiers of ideal young masculinity.

Conclusion

Sex, sexualities, and sexualization are well-trodden areas when exploring the everyday lives and representations of women and, particularly in recent years, girls (see, for example, Allen, 2003; Clark, 2013; Coy, 2009; Renold, Ringrose, & Egan, 2015). These topics remain, however, under theorized issues in the lives of men and boys (with notable exceptions such as Connell, 2000; Clark & Duschinsky, 2018; Vanska, 2011). This article has responded to calls within the academic community for greater exploration of what it means to "do boy" or the ways of offer of being a man in contemporary cultures (Garner, 2012).

FDA was used to consider the subject positions presented to young men within an U.K. television sitcom aimed at a young adult audience. Discursive objects and imagery constructed within the text of *The Inbetweeners* were identified by viewing and reviewing the character portrayals of Jay, Neil, Simon, and Will and their position within the wider narratives of the series and films. By identifying the positioning of sex in relation to masculinity and boyhood, light can be shed upon the sanctioned ways made available to "do" adolescence and masculinity and to "be" a boy and a sexual being. Of the potential themes, three have been examined here. First, sex is ubiquitous and thus marked as a key feature of the life of the teenage boy. Sex occupies a position within boyhood where sexual knowledge, experience, and activeness are signifiers of successful masculinity. Although the boys fumble in their attempts at (hetero)sexual sex the very process of failing serves to reinforce this dominant discursive motif of the ideal man. Second, successful masculinity is represented as depending on the performance of heterosexuality through sexual action and talk and this is heavily policed through peer-led banter and language which highlights the negativity associated with homophobia and femininity. The term *gay* is applied variously to people, objects, and actions but always in a derogatory manner to identify something that is perceived as transgressing sexual or gendered boundaries. This could be because one of the boys appears attracted to others of the same sex or, much more frequently, is engaging in feminized behavior. Both these kinds of performances are considered as antithetical to the successful performance of ideal young masculinity.

Third, and finally, heterosexuality as the default approved sexual subjecthood for young men results in the positioning of women not ever as part of a platonic relationship but with the constant potential for sexual activity and/or objectification. The boundaries of femininity are also policed within the boys' sexual talk with women and girls readily identified as not embodying or performing correct femininity. Girls who transgress the feminine ideal, generally by not conforming to rigid stereotypes relating to weight, height, and other embodied ideals, are readily identified. Girls who do embody the feminine ideal are objectified with constant reference to their body parts (clunge, jugs, etc.) and to how the boys would treat or take them sexually given the chance. It is not only internal or embodied attributes, such as emotional regulation or sexual knowledge and readiness, which are signifiers of young hegemonic masculinity but also, and importantly, external objects of romantic and sexual desire. The social positioning of the boy suffers if their desires are directed at a (female) subject who is not exhibiting the right kind of performance and is enhanced if they do indeed embody the right kind of girlhood.

In conclusion, although possible to read *The Inbetweeners* as a revolutionary text this article considers such representations of boys sexualities and sexual talk as contributing to the reification of dominant models of (hetero)sex as crucial to the performance of successful masculinity (and femininity). The implications for this in the lived experiences of young men require exploration with boys themselves about their perceptions and negotiations of such cultural imagery. However, such representations, as identified here, do have the potential to impact upon the lives of boys as particular ways of "doing boy" and "being masculine" are opened and restricted. There are significant implications for performances which show boys objectifying girls, which use humor and comedy to display failed masculinity and which remove emotional expression from boys' (hetero)sexual identity. The boys are operating in an emotionally impoverished, tightly governed matrix of gendered and sexed relationships where they have little power or autonomy over how they would like to perform boyhood masculinities and sexualities. The problem with this is that behaviors needed to perform successfully in the transition to adult male sexuality such as homophobia or misogyny actually become demonized by wider adult society as evidence of insidious sexualizing processes or hypermasculinization within childhood and youth (see Clark & Duschinsky, 2018). Thus, boys run a tightrope that is different to the one well documented for girls. Generally, boys operate from a position of potentially greater power and privilege than girls due to the historical (and indeed contemporary) positioning of both gender and sexuality, discursively and structurally. They do not have to operate within the frigid/slut dynamic, but such is the significance of sex to successful adult masculinity that they must operate within a dichotomy of ideal hegemonic masculinity/failure. The image currently presented is that sexual desire for the "right kind of boy" is innate, uncontrollable, and ideally devoid of emotional expression, and that the appropriate direction for this is the "right kind of girl."

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Author Biography

Jessica Clark is a senior lecturer in Sociology and Childhood and Youth Studies at the University of Suffolk, UK. Her research interests focus on children, gender, sexuality, and popular culture as well as ethical issues in research with children. Her most recent publications include a co-authored paper on the sexualisation of boys in *Sexualities*, a book chapter on representations of disability, and a forthcoming co-edited book on children's agency in popular culture (Lexington).