RON BECKER
Miami University

JUDITH WEINER
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Making sense of a bromance: Talking with straight men about *I Love You, Man*

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between mediated bromance narratives and shifting constructions of heterosexual masculinity through a qualitative, cultural studies audience analysis of I Love You, Man *(Hamburg, 2009). We conducted one-on-one interviews with 38 straight-identified male college students in which respondents were asked to discuss their reactions to the film, their friendships with men (including gay men) and their use of the bromance discourse. The film's depiction of male bonding and the bromance discourse itself, we argue, spoke most productively to the men seeking to reconcile their investment in traditional norms of manhood with emerging incentives to renounce such norms as regressive.*

KEYWORDS

bromance
friendship
hegemony
homosociality
male bonding
masculinities
representation

By 2010, the bromance discourse – the frequently ironic framing of male friendship in terms of traditional romance tropes – had emerged as a new way to understand a particularly close relationship between two (usually heterosexual) men in US popular culture and in some people's everyday vocabulary. Like 'metrosexuality' a few years earlier, journalists circulated the term in trend pieces about contemporary masculinity, and critics used it to discuss

a spate of films (e.g. *Superbad* [Mottola, 2007], *The Hangover* [Phillips, 2009], *21 Jump Street* [Lord and Miller, 2012]) and television series (e.g. *Scrubs* [2001–2010, NBC/ABC], *Entourage* [2004–2011, HBO], *Bromance* [2008–2009, MTV]) that dealt self-reflectively with homosocial intimacy. Media scholars have examined the numerous incarnations of the bromance discourse, analysing its complex gender politics, mapping out the contours of the bromance-film genre, tracing its links to 1970s buddy movies and noting its debt to romantic comedies (Wyatt 2001; Troyer and Marchiselli 2005; Marshall 2011; Chen 2012; Alberti 2013; Lavigne 2013; San Filippo 2013; Boyle and Berridge 2014; DeAngelis 2014; Lotz 2014).

In this article, we add to such textual analyses with a qualitative, cultural studies audience analysis of 38 straight-identified male college students' use of the bromance discourse in their social exchanges and their interpretations of one specific bromance narrative, *I Love You, Man* (Hamburg, 2009). Perhaps the 'quintessential model for the cinematic bromance' (DeAngelis 2014: 11), this comedy serves as a productive entry point for talking with our respondents about their experiences of masculinity and homosociality within the context of the bromance discourse. In the film, Peter Klaven, a newly engaged, straight real estate agent played by Paul Rudd, navigates the tricky terrain of male bonding. The film establishes Peter as the quintessential girlfriend guy, more comfortable making milkshakes for his fiancée, Zooey (played by Rashida Jones), and her friends than hanging out with other guys. This becomes a problem when Peter realizes he does not have a close male friend to be his best man. The film follows Peter's awkward efforts to find one as he goes on a series of failed 'man dates'. Although his gay brother warns him to keep things casual by just getting coffee, Peter has dinner with Doug (played by Thomas Lennon, who also plays the sexually ambiguous lieutenant in *Reno 911!* [2003–2009, Comedy Central]), a family friend who just moved to town. Things go well enough until Doug ends the evening by leaning in for a lengthy kiss. Peter does not do any better connecting with the guys at his fencing club or at work, but his luck turns when he meets Syd, a straight, laid-back eccentric played by Jason Segel. The men build a friendship, hanging out at Syd's 'man cave', playing air guitar and going to a Rush concert. Just when Peter seems to have found his best man, tensions arise and the two 'break up'. On the day of Peter's wedding, however, Syd crashes the ceremony, and Peter and Zooey's vows are put on hold for Peter and Syd's reconciliation. The film ends as each declares, 'I love you, man'; their bromance has its happy ending.

I Love You, Man and the bromance discourse more broadly are embedded in the ongoing reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity. So too are the men we interviewed for this article, and through our conversations with them we hoped to better understand the extent to which the bromance discourse helps them to navigate 'between their personal experiences and the broader sociohistorical structures that shape their lives' (Weber 2010: 345). The film's comedic narrative of male bonding seemed to dovetail most easily with a sizeable group of men we call 'ambivalent bros'. These men's responses to Peter's story, their opinions about the film's gay characters and their use of the term 'bromance' in their own interpersonal relationships overlapped in meaningful ways. The movie's bromance discourse resonated with them so strongly, we argue, because it helped them reconcile their investment in norms of traditional masculinity with their desire to embrace an emerging construction of masculinity – one that included being gay-friendly. We juxtapose this group's

reactions to the film against those of a number of other men who had notably different – sometimes more comfortable, sometimes more fraught – relationships to traditional masculinity and, as a result, to the film and the bromance discourse itself. Before turning to our analysis of the interviews, we map out the broader 'sociohistorical structures' (Weber 2010: 345) that shape the bromance discourse and our respondents' experiences of it.

HOMOHYSTERIA, MALE FRIENDSHIPS AND HYBRID MASCULINITIES

For much of the twentieth century, hegemonic masculinity was defined by traits such as dominance, strength, competitiveness, heterosexual prowess and emotional detachment. It was also fuelled by what Eric Anderson (2009) calls homohysteria and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) calls male homosexual panic: a systemic anxiety rooted in the conflation of homosexuality with passivity and effeminacy. Because access to patriarchal privilege required men to bond with other men in male-dominated spaces, men were held to a tricky imperative: hang out with other men but never be gay. For this modern construction of masculinity, the line between homosocial intimacy and homosexual desire (or between male bonding and same-sex sexual behaviour) mattered tremendously; however, that line could also be difficult to discern, resulting in a pervasive fear of crossing it or being accused of crossing it (Plummer 1999; Kimmel 2001; Kimmel 2009).

Homohysteria excluded openly gay men from normative masculinity, but it also served as a coercive force that pressured all men to conform to rigid gender norms as a way to prove their manhood – norms that included engaging in practices of homophobic othering (Curry 1991; Martino 2000; Muir and Seitz 2004). Such dynamics might be most clearly observed in the pervasive use of what C. J. Pascoe has called 'the fag discourse' (2007: viii) among teenage boys (e.g. statements such as 'don't be a fag, man') to establish their own normative masculinity, police their peers' behaviour and/or claim a position at the top of a homosocial pecking order (Pascoe 2007). In a homohysteric context, male friendships are especially precarious, existing as they do without the legitimating justifications of the family, workplace or team. Friendship is voluntary; like lovers, people often become friends because they care about and are drawn to each other – an experience that does not dovetail easily with a normative masculinity defined by emotional detachment and haunted by homosexuality (Messner 2001; Nardi 2007). Various scripts and practices have helped straight men to manage the dangers of friendship intimacies; studies have shown that men typically express affection or admiration through teasing, use 'safe' topics like sports to avoid emotional sharing and engage in parallel rather than face-to-face activities (Kiesling 2005).

Sociologists, however, have identified new 'hybrid masculinities', constructions of gender and homosocial interactions that have emerged in social landscapes altered by feminism, multiculturalism and neo-liberalism. Such forces have led to the 'de-naturalisation, de-traditionalisation and politicisation of men's identities' (Ashe 2007: 32). Men increasingly navigate complex terrains wherein traditional manhood and many of the privileges that come with it exist alongside emerging imperatives, incentives and desires to renounce that masculinity as regressive. Men experience and respond to these '"lived" ideological dilemmas' (Korobov 2005: 243) in varying ways. Feminist scholars, for example, have critiqued the use of ironic humour as a tactic through which men engage in sexist and homophobic masculinities but claim they are

not being serious (Gill 2007). In other cases, men are adopting attitudes and behaviours that were once deemed feminine or homosexual; so-called metro-sexuality's comfort with traditionally feminine grooming practices is just one example (Bird 1996; Arxer 2011; Bridges 2014; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Cann 2014; Gough et al. 2014).

Eric Anderson and Mark McCormack (2013) specifically link such hybrid masculinities to a post-1990s decline of homohysteria. They argue that although individual men may still hold homophobic attitudes, grow-ing social acceptance of homosexuality has weakened the structural lever that coerced men to conform to traditional ideals of manhood. As a result, straight men can engage in a wider range of gendered behaviours with-out losing masculine status, including new forms of homosocial intimacy. In their ethnographies of college men, Anderson and McCormack (2013) observed straight men who were not only comfortable with, but also sought out, emotional and physical intimacy with other men in ways that transgressed traditional norms of hegemonic masculinity. The men they observed, for example, openly discussed engaging in certain 'sex' acts (e.g. letting gay men lick alcohol off their stomachs at parties, receiving oral sex from gay men) without worrying that their peers would question their heterosexuality or masculinity (Anderson 2009; see also Ward 2015).

Such shifting constructions of gender also involve a change in how people think about sexuality. Homohysteria was energized by a Freudian-esque latency model in which homosexuality was a mysterious psychological condi-tion that could afflict anyone at any time and by a self-sustaining paranoia: if homophobia keeps people in the closet, then any man one encounters could actually be a secret homosexual. According to Ron Becker (2009), that model is being displaced by an emerging 'post-closet logic' in which declining homophobia and increasing gay cultural visibility make it easier for some to assume that anyone who is gay is out of the closet and anyone who does not self-identify as gay is securely straight. Even if naïve, this assumption supports a belief that one's sexual identity is secure. For straight men, greater confi-dence in the stable boundary of their heterosexual identity would likely alter how they engage with other men (Becker 2014).

The bromance discourse is firmly embedded in this shifting terrain and negotiates the dynamics of contemporary gender politics and male friend-ship in complicated ways. Some textual analyses of media bromance narra-tives suggest that the discourse can critique traditional masculinity, challenge homophobic exclusion and promote transgressive homosocial intimacies. Others suggest that it can repackage sexist and homophobic masculini-ties in more politically palatable guises, legitimate the exclusion of women from men's emotional lives and reaffirm normative manhood as heterosex-ual. Bromance narratives can revel in the instability of heterosexual mascu-linity even as they work to disavow it, stirring up anxieties about it only to manage those anxieties in the end (Greven 2010, 2014). When a discourse is as slippery and polyvalent as the bromance, exploring the varied ways that socially positioned viewers engage with it can contribute useful perspectives to scholars' close textual readings. Accordingly, for this study we talked with a group of straight-identified male college students about their homosocial friendships, their interpretations of I Love You, Man and their everyday use of bromance terms in order to better understand how they experience the bromance discourse and the shifting gender environment that fuels it. In the process, we began to understand some of the ways these men 'do masculinity

within the gray areas between hegemonic masculinity and lived gender practices' (Weber 2010: 337).

THE STUDY

We interviewed 38 straight-identified men attending a mid-sized US public university in the Midwest. Students were recruited from introductory courses in Communication, Classics and Political Science and were offered extra credit to participate. All but one (a 34-year-old returning student) were between the ages of 18 and 24. Although we did not gather information about racial identity, three men identified themselves as African American and one as Native American during their interviews; we suspect the other 34 would likely identify as white, though only two explicitly did so during their interviews. We did not gather information about the respondents' economic class, but most students at this university come from households with incomes much higher than the national mean. Having said that, a few of the participants explicitly distanced themselves from what they perceived as their peers' affluence. After watching *I Love You, Man*, each respondent participated individually in a face-to-face, semi-structured interview with one of the authors, during which he was asked to identify the scenes he found most humorous and most uncomfortable and to discuss his opinions about specific characters and other aspects of the film's narrative. Respondents were also asked about their use of various terms related to the bromance and fag discourses (e.g. 'bromance', 'fag', 'man crush', 'man dates' 'no homo', 'that's so gay'), their friendships with other men (including gay men) and their attitudes about homosexuality. Prior to their interviews, respondents completed a brief questionnaire that measured attitudes about male role ideals. Data were analysed to examine the mean score on each item as well as on the following sub-dimensions: rejection of homosexuality, avoidance of femininity, self-reliance, aggression, achievement status, attitudes towards sex and restrictive emotionality (Levant and Fischer 1998). The survey results played a limited role in the analysis for this article, serving only as additional data points to help gain an impression of these men's attitudes about masculinity.

The interviews, which ranged in length from 30 to 75 minutes, were transcribed by the authors and analysed by Becker for emerging themes and patterns. Aliases were assigned to maintain anonymity. Our respondents do not reflect a representative sample of straight-identified college men, and the observations we make about these men's engagement with the film and the bromance discourse are not generalizable. Instead, our goal is to add these men's experiences to our understanding of mediated bromance narratives and the changing conditions within which men 'do gender' (West and Fenstermaker 2011: 214). What follows, it should be noted, reflects our interpretation of their experiences as accessed through the interviews. We have included numerous, sometimes lengthy quotations in order to help our respondents' voices come through as directly as possible.

Although our respondent pool was homogeneous on many counts, our analysis led us to identify a sizeable subset – fifteen of the 38 men – whose responses clustered in notable ways on several topics (e.g. their attitudes towards certain characters and use of bromance terms). These 'ambivalent bros', as we call them, constituted the most common shared reading position. The other men's responses often positioned them outside of that group to varying degrees and for various reasons. Occasionally smaller and less

distinct clusters emerged among the other men. For example, we identify a group of five men whom we call 'traditionalists', whose responses to the film's main characters converged in ways that set them apart from the other men. We also spotlight two other respondents whose reactions to the film were unique. Of the remaining sixteen men, several overlapped in many ways with the ambivalent bros but their answers on certain themes did not cluster as strongly, so we choose not to place them in that group. In other cases, the men's responses were inadequately revealing for us to draw distinctions with confidence. Finally, a few men's responses hinted at other reading positions. Ryan, a 19-year-old engineering major, for example, linked Peter's awkward efforts to engage with Syd to dynamics of racialized difference:

> Because I'm black and some – most – of my guy friends are white, especially here on campus, I'll be talking and I might say some slang word from back home and they'll be like, 'Wait, what's that?' So that reminds me of how Peter wasn't always sure what Sydney was talking about or they'll try to. They'll hear me talk and I might say a nickname for one of them and they might try to imitate it by doing something like that.

All of the men we interviewed shared an understanding of 'the bro' as a potentially barbed term used to identify a type of man on campus. In explaining the term, Adam, a 23-year-old architecture student, stated,

> I guess a bro could parallel fraternity, 'fratastic' and, you know, typical stuff. Bros are usually, I would assume, usually homophobic, sports-oriented, party-oriented, you know, enjoy the company of multiple women, very stereotypical, you know, young adult males who are much more good-time-oriented, self-interested, you know. They have a bunch of good friends, the group of friends parties, you know. I guess it's a very stereotypical term.

Adam also volunteered that he had 'bro tendencies', as he put it. 'With the right group of people around me', he admitted, 'I could become bro in about two minutes'. Based on our interviews, we would submit that many of our respondents could have bro tendencies. We identify some of the men as 'ambivalent bros', not to imply that we know a truth about them or that they could ever be reduced to the stereotype Adam lay outs but rather to convey their closer relationship (compared to other respondents) to a hybrid masculinity that is invested in, yet conflicted about, certain traditional gender norms. Drawing this distinction helps us to make sense of our participants' varied engagements with *I Love You, Man*'s bromance narrative, yet we do not want to overstate the category's determining role. There were many points on which all of the men's responses overlapped and variation within the groups. Still, the differences between the reactions of the ambivalent bros and respondents most unlike them help us understand how men can relate differently to the bromance and the shifting gender order in which they live.

TALKING ABOUT PETER AND BARRY

The men we talked to responded to the character of Peter Klaven and his series of man dates with varying degrees of sympathy and identification. Most of the men, including the ambivalent bros, viewed Peter favourably,

describing him as 'likeable', 'caring', 'dependable', 'hard-working' and a 'comforting guy, definitely in touch with his emotions'. Many said they would likely be friends with Peter, and several identified strongly with his reserved personality and his focus on his girlfriend over guy friends. While they found Peter's man dates strange, they could sympathize with his situation. Jake, a 19-year-old marketing major, for example, could see himself in Peter's shoes:

> It's weird cuz my roommate, he's transferring, and I don't know who I'm gonna room with next semester and I'm watching this movie and thinking, 'I could see myself doing this actually, like going on man dates, trying to find someone to room with, like a best friend'. So it was an interesting premise and something I've never considered before watching the movie, but it's something I could see myself doing, and have a need for.

The connection the men felt with Peter should not be surprising. Although Peter's painfully awkward gender trouble could, in theory, make him a tricky character for male viewers, the film mitigates that discomfort via comedy and turns Peter into a likeable underdog. As Patrick pointed out, 'The movie is designed to make you feel like you're on his side, like you want to see him succeed'. One way it does this is by juxtaposing Peter favourably against other men (e.g. his obnoxious, overly competitive co-worker Tevin [played by Rob Huebel] and the semi-closeted drama queen and potential friend Doug) and aligning him with men who are more successful in terms of the film's gender sensibility (e.g. his confident gay brother Robbie [played by Andy Samberg] and his laid-back, nonconformist best man Syd), who help transform him into a less painfully awkward, though still non-traditional, guy. That this narrative strategy helped warm some of the men up to Peter is illustrated by Jason, a 19-year-old business major who, when asked which of the guys in the film he would be friends with, replied, 'Probably Pete at the end; not at all with the early Pete, but definitely the changed Pete'.

Peter's appeal and the appeal of his story (almost all of the men reported enjoying the film overall) also suggest the extent to which the film and these men exist in a broader environment marked by the kind of self-conscious awareness and renegotiation of gender norms that are associated with emerging hybrid masculinities. This attitude is best illustrated by Will, a 19-year-old ambivalent bro who, after describing Peter as 'girly' and as having 'feminine characteristics', went on to explain why that is positive:

> A really true masculine person has to have a little bit of feminine-like kind of characteristics in them, like that they probably inherited from their mom and stuff, cuz that's why when he says 'I love you, man' at the end, I feel like guys don't want to say that, cuz that's what girls do all the time. They tell their friends they love them, like all the time. And guys aren't supposed to do that because that's what girls do, but really it's actually something really good to do.

This hybrid-masculine sensibility is also evident in these men's reactions to Barry (played by Jon Favreau), one of the men Peter tries to bond with and the man who serves as the clearest counterpoint to his softer masculinity. Barry is an insensitive, aggressive alpha male who cannot stand Peter. For example, when Peter joins his friends for a poker party, Barry calls him an 'asshole' and eventually kicks him out. Most of the men understood that Barry represented

traditional hegemonic manhood, or, as Logan, a 19-year-old business major, put it, 'how people perceive most males'. Almost all of the men we interviewed also agreed that Barry was 'a dick' or 'a douchebag' and identified him as the one guy they would definitely not be friends with.

The ambivalent bros, however, had a complex relationship with the masculinity that Barry represented. Although they often expressed a strong dislike for Barry, they also admitted that they hang out with guys like him all the time, and when asked later which scenes best reflected how they interact with their male friends, they usually referred to the scenes with Barry. Matt, a 19-year-old political science major, for example, struggled to explain his conflicted reaction to Barry:

> See, that one's tough, because, like, when Peter goes over there, if I was in that environment, I would be comfortable just playing poker with the guys, smoking cigars, whatever. I would feel comfortable in that environment, but kind of [Barry's] reaction I, I don't know. I'm not really sure. Like I have friends that are like him, but I wouldn't say they are my closest friends. They'd be someone I'd hang out with, but it'd be someone I wouldn't enjoy hanging out with all the time [*laughs*].

Logan explained a similar distinction he makes between 'bros' – 'over-the-top', 'frat-y guys' who 'objectify women a lot', 'make the sexual and even the homosexual jokes' – and his 'boys', who presumably do not act 'over-the-top' (or at least not all the time). Logan said he hangs out with 'bros', but his 'boys' are his 'real friends'. We categorize Matt and Logan as ambivalent bros not to discount the real distinctions that exist for them, but rather to highlight the relationship these men have to the masculinity represented by Barry and 'the bro'. Other men we interviewed, for example, did not recognize any of their friends in Barry and would not have felt 'comfortable' at the poker party. But the term also underscores their desire to distance themselves from that form of manhood as they navigate a tricky landscape wherein the residual power of traditional masculinity mingles with emerging imperatives to denounce that masculinity as regressive. The preferred reading of Peter's story, we argue, is aligned most closely with the sensibility of the men looking to reconcile the resulting tensions (Hall 1980).

In contrast, other men in our study found Peter and his story decidedly more troubling, although they approach the text from two very distinct positions. Unlike the vast majority of the men in the study who expressed some sympathy for Peter, five of the men – a group we call 'traditionalists' – were extremely judgmental of him, describing him as 'passive', 'indecisive' and 'very feminine'. None of the traditionalists saw themselves being friends with Peter. Thomas, a 24-year-old public administration major, said, with a decidedly disapproving tone, 'Man, like he has to prove himself to the world. He's like, everyone, no matter who they are, deserve[s] an explanation of his thoughts and emotions'.

Although Peter's awkward gender transgressions were often a source of comedic pleasure or even identification for the ambivalent bros, these men were discomfited by them. We asked each respondent to discuss which scenes he thought were 'most humorous' and which were 'weirdest or most uncomfortable'. These respondents were much more likely than their peers to identify scenes featuring Barry's or Syd's vulgarity as funny and scenes featuring Peter's gender failures (or, as traditionalist Patrick put it, 'when he acts like

a girl') as weird. In discussing his reaction to the scene in which Peter fails miserably to engage in male banter with his fencing teammates, Thomas reported, 'I honestly had to stop it and look away; I couldn't even look at it. I'm like "Oh, my God"'. For Ethan, such scenes undermined his overall enjoyment of the film:

> It's funny, but it makes you feel awkward. I guess that's part of my beef with it. Whereas other movies like *Superbad*, [*The*] *40-Year-Old Virgin* [Apatow, 2005] and whatever else he did, *Knocked Up* [Apatow, 2007], those didn't really have much awkwardness in them, and this is like a whole different kind of realm. […] I think it's a funny movie [but] I would probably rather watch one of the other movies.

The film's makeover narrative, it seems, didn't rehabilitate Peter's gender enough for the traditionalists. Unlike many of their peers, these men did not seem to be engaged in the same self-reflective reassessment of traditional masculinity, putting them at odds with the film's narrative. None of them, for example, said they had a problem with Barry. Thomas and Colin, in fact, identified Barry as the guy in the film they would most likely be friends with. Thomas described Barry as 'short, sweet and to the point' and explained, 'One thing I loved about him was when they were sitting at the poker table and Peter won when they were playing Texas Hold'em, he let Peter know that he was pissed off'. As these men's negotiated readings of the film suggest, the forces fuelling the emergence of hybrid masculinities are experienced by men unevenly, even in a relatively homogeneous group like our study.

Two other men also struggled with the film's preferred reading, but for a strikingly different reason. Joe, a 19-year-old business major, and Brian, a 34-year-old returning student, empathized deeply with Peter, making his story poignant for them in a way that none of the other men discussed. 'I felt like I was watching myself in the movie', Joe said. 'It was scary how similar his life is and I could imagine if I was getting married, like, I wouldn't have anyone'. Unlike their peers who mainly identified with Peter as a girlfriend guy (i.e. a guy who prioritizes his relationship with his girlfriend over those with his bros), Joe and Brian identified more with Peter's inability to connect with other men, an important difference that reflects their more fraught relationship with normative heterosexual masculinity. Brian revealed,

> Still today, I have no real male friends. I have always been able to relate with women very well. Again, probably one of my best friends growing up was my mother. She was the one I confided in when I had problems and something bothered me. I can see [Peter] in the same way with the relationship [with Zooey] – you know, wanting to cling onto that one person that he loves.

For them, rather than seeming comical or weird, scenes of Peter's awkwardness were painfully familiar. Peter's failed effort to connect with his fencing teammates reminded Joe of his experiences on campus:

> When they're going to parties and stuff and they would all be talking about that, and I would be like 'oh', similar to how, you know, Peter was all, like, they're going to a party and then Peter was there, wanting to know what was going on. Kinda like that's how I am. They're talking

about their party and I don't really go in those circles but wanted to see what was going on. It was like I could tell it was really weird, because I could tell that they didn't really want me to come along even though they didn't really know me.

In contrast to their peers, Joe and Brian were more likely to discuss the pathos of Peter's situation (rather than the humour) and how Peter felt (rather than how uncomfortable he made them feel). Brian, for example, actually slipped into the first person when describing Peter:

He's definitely a non-typical man that is out to please people; [he] never really has felt like he has fit in. With his family you can see that. Like, even with his father, you know, his father is finding his brother as his best friend. I'm wondering, 'Why am I not your best friend?'

For Joe and Brian, Peter's quest to find a male friend spoke to a deep ambivalence about homosocial bonding. On the one hand, both discussed the powerful appeal of having male friends. In recounting how he felt when a work colleague called to socialize, Brian recounted,

Oh, my god. It really surprised me. It felt really good inside. So it was kinda like Peter when he gets that phone call after the first time they went out together and this guy calls him back. It's like, 'Oh, my gosh, someone actually wants to have conversation with me. Another male, not just a female'.

For Joe, not having guy friends had led his peers to question his heterosexuality, an experience that was very difficult for him.

It bothered me, I'll say that. Not only because it was untrue, but just [*long pause*], just – I don't really know how else to describe it. Just feeling that, that you're different; it's like they view you differently, they don't take you seriously or, like, you're somehow – they don't want to be around you, like you're tainted or broken or something like that.

While both longed for male friendship and/or the gender capital that came with it, they also defended their choices to focus on friendships with women and discussed the landmines that lurk in homosocial interactions. 'I feel like with guys, you always have this pressure to, like, not – you have to watch what you say', Joe said. 'You don't want to seem like you're too smart or, like, you know, talk about, I don't know, anything that might be girly or anything like that'.

Joe and Brian were the only men to push back on the logic of the film's premise: the assumption that Peter *needs* to find male friends. For Joe, the film's most 'painful' moment was the scene in which Peter overhears Zooey's friends tell her that his friendlessness is a problem she needs to fix. Brian's wife, who had concerns that his lack of friends was a symptom of homosexuality, also pressured him to seek out male friends, an unpleasant experience that led him to frame the makeover narrative as coercive and cruel. 'It just feels strange to even go out to try to do that', he said. 'I shouldn't have to go out to try to make friends, you know. Either they're there or they're not, you know. But of course [Peter] was doing it to please his wife, just like me'. Parts of the film were difficult for Brian to watch, not because of Peter's awkwardness

but rather because he felt he was the target of many of the jokes. In the end, however, he said he was glad he saw the film yet seemed to experience it as a drama rather than a comedy:

> It really shed some light on some things. Like I said, it hit on some emotional sides, but yet in the same sense, it's like you know what I'm doing is also not abnormal. It is normal, too. There's [sic] other people that's [sic] going through the same situation, you know, so it's not just me.

While many of the film's preferred pleasures may require self-reflective distance from traditional norms of manhood, Joe's and Brian's interview responses indicate that those pleasures are easier to access for men who have enough gender capital built upon those norms to manage the stress Peter's story can engender. The issues raised by Peter Klaven's bromance narrative would understandably be more pointed for straight men whose own unconventional masculinity made them feel tainted and misunderstood – men who have been made to feel like girly guys rather than girlfriend guys.

USING THE BROMANCE

Another point of difference among the men we interviewed was their own use of the bromance discourse that *I Love You, Man* helped to circulate. We broached the topic with 32 of the 38 men we interviewed. All of them were aware of the concept, and most of them shared a broad sense that the term referred to an 'atypically close relationship with two guys who seem to have a closer connection than the average buddies', as ambivalent bro Adam put it. Four respondents said the term could also be used to refer to a group of guys. Several credited *I Love You, Man* with introducing the bromantic concept of 'man dates' to them. Fourteen of the men said that although they heard 'bromance' used in the media or around campus, they never used the term themselves, nor did their friends. (When asked if they used it themselves, three non-users replied in ways that suggested that the only guys on campus who used the term were bros, a group they clearly didn't identify with.) In general, these non-users assumed the term was a neutral descriptor or had positive connotations. The remaining eighteen men – a group that included the fifteen ambivalent bros – indicated that either they used it themselves or it was commonly used in their close friendship circle. Of those, three said the term had negative connotations, three said it was neutral and twelve said it was a positive way to discuss a male friendship.

Such statistics, however, only hint at the dynamics of the respondents' usage of the discourse. Nick, a 24-year-old, fifth-year psychology major and ambivalent bro, elaborated on the kind of 'atypical' intimacy that defines his own bromance:

> Say I'm talking to my friend Brian and I'm telling him about something that really means a lot to me, like, we kinda have that equal feeling where when we have strong emotions or like we're sad or something, we have that little bromance between each other where we understand each other.

For Grant, a 20-year-old education major who epitomized the ambivalent bro as much as any of the men, the bromance allowed him to talk to his peers about his homosocial desire for, or attraction to, another guy:

I said it to some of my really close friends that I hang out with on a regular basis. And I think I just came back from class and we were all sitting there and I was just like, 'Dude, I totally have a bromance for a guy in my class'. And, like, I feel like a couple of kids didn't know the meaning of it and they kind of got a little bit shocked at first, and then I was like, I clarified, like, 'He wears clothes that I wear, or he gives answers that I would give. He seems like a really cool guy'. And after that, when [I'd] come back from the class, it'd be like, 'Did you get to talk to that guy today?' and I was like, 'Yeah, a little bit, but I found out that he's two years older than I am and actively involved in a frat and that's not really what I'm a part of'. And they're like, 'Aw, that sucks'. And I'm like, 'Aw, yeah'.

As Grant's friends' 'shock' suggests, the bromance discourse can playfully confuse homosociality with homosexuality. Respondents' definitions of the term often acknowledged that feature. Alex, for example, defined the bromance as 'two really, really good guy friends that are just friends but, like, outside look like they might be [...] homosexuals', and Jake discussed its tendency to imply 'an association of being gay with each other'. Others raised the connection in the process of repudiating it. According to Zach, a 19-year-old engineering major, a bromance is 'two guys hanging out and really being close to each other, not necessarily in a gay way or anything, but just being really close and bonded'. One respondent said the term could only be used to discuss a group of male friends; if used for two guys, it would refer to a gay couple.

Our interviews make clear that the bromance discourse can be a source of miscommunication as well as a site of struggle over gender practices. Grant, who regularly used the term in relation to his own friendships, explained the challenges he experienced when talking to some of his conservative Christian friends:

I've heard people use it in a negative light, but I don't think they truly know what it means. Because, well, I guess I could not know what it means, too, but I feel like from the general consensus that I got, it doesn't mean anything regarding [being] homosexual or anything like that, where some people are like, 'You what? Why would you say something like that if you're not gay?' I feel like your understanding would, I mean, if you correctly understand it, I feel like it's positive, I feel like some people prejudge that term as a negative term.

Used 'positively', the term can make visible and affirm forms of homosocial intimacy that are at odds with traditional manhood in ways that might undermine homohysteria. Used negatively, it can work to police transgressive gender practices and bolster homohysteria.

A striking quality of the discourse is the way it enables men to navigate the shifting gender terrain by oscillating between earnestness and insincerity. Delivered through ironic humour as it so often is, the bromance discourse can simultaneously affirm and contain. When we asked the men if they thought the term was positive or derogatory, they often struggled to answer. Mark, an 18-year-old mass communication major, for example, said that he had only used the term 'in a sarcastic manner' about other people; when asked if that meant negatively, he elaborated, 'I don't know if negative would be the

right word, but I would use it in a sarcastic but unhurtful manner'. Owen, a 19-year-old marketing major, described a scenario in which the term is used with what might be characterized as unhurtful sarcasm or warm teasing:

> Well, there's a person in my fraternity that makes music and me and him hang out quite a bit, like I hang out in his room, so whenever it turns out I've been chillin' in his room for like four hours playing video games, people make jokes about us dating or being in a relationship. When people hang out for an enormous amount of time, we make jokes about it.

19-year-old Logan, who feels it is a 'very positive term', explains the utility of bromantic humour. When asked how he uses it, he replied, 'Mostly jokingly, but we actually mean it', explaining the joking quality as 'an escape'. When 'somebody makes fun of the relationship that I have with a guy', he explained,

> then it's always, 'Oh, no, yeah, we got a bromance going on' [*in a tone of sheepish acknowledgement*]. You joke about it but you know it's true. [...] And you say it because you want to tell that person that, but you don't want to feel awkward and actually, literally, come out and saying like 'I love you'.

I Love You, Man's use of comedic tropes that wraps Peter's man dates and his relationship with Syd in the guise of a romance also seemed to oscillate this tricky line of affirmation and containment well for many of the men. Alex, for example, said,

> One thing I liked a lot in the movie was, like, you know, you have all these romance movies or scenes in movies where, like, the one main character is going around and seeing all these relationships with other people, like a montage sequence. In a regular romance movie there would be a couple walking [and holding] hands in the park, or, like, two people kissing on a bench or, like, two people at a cafe, like guy and a girl, but in this one it was, like, four dudes roll up in a car, and he says 'Hi', and they all give him a funny look, and then two guys jogging through the park – I thought, I liked that.

In discussing why he liked the film's final scene in which Peter and Syd exchange increasingly ludicrous variations of 'I love you, man', Devon described it as a 'traditional happy ending. But, like, it wasn't over emotionally gushy; it didn't indulge in the things chick flicks tend to indulge in. [It was] exactly how a bromance should end'. Like so many of the men's own use of the term, the film's bromantic humour acknowledged homosocial intimacy's transgressive elements and provided enough jokiness in order to 'escape' too much risk. Thus, the bromance discourse offers straight men a new script or practice for managing the dangers of friendship intimacies.

TALKING ABOUT GAY GUYS

Given the relationships between the bromance and homosexuality and between hybrid masculinities and declining homohysteria, we were interested in how the men responded to the gay characters in *I Love You, Man*. The

film draws attention to three non-straight characters: Robbie, as mentioned earlier, is Peter's openly gay and conventionally masculine brother who gives him advice about how not to give men the wrong impression on his man dates; Doug is the seemingly gay guy who kisses Peter at the end of his first man date and briefly appears later as a jilted lover jealous of Peter and Syd's bromance; and Alan (played by Josh Cooke), a much smaller role, is an ostensibly straight guy Robbie hits on at the gym who appears later as Robbie's date. Robbie and Doug also serve as Peter's groomsmen in the final wedding scene.

Gay characters are common elements of bromance narratives. Some scholars argue that their presence helps secure the heterosexual identity of the straight characters (and perhaps the straight men watching) who are caught in the ambiguity of the bromance scenario (Alberti 2013; Boyle and Berridge 2014). The gay characters in *I Love You, Man* appear to have played this role for our respondents, at least to some extent. When asked why they thought the gay characters were included, some men stated that they helped to clarify the platonic nature of Peter's man dates. 'I guess it was to show the opposite of what Peter's trying to do', Nick said. Mark agreed: 'Probably to show, like, that two guys can, like, be really close but, like, not, um, gay I guess'. While three respondents mentioned that they had momentarily thought that Peter was going to end up being gay (because of the film's title and his unconventional masculinity), no one else questioned his sexuality, likely in part because of the presence of an openly gay character like Robbie. On the other hand, far more men talked about the way the gay characters helped to draw attention to the potentially queer aspects of homosocial interactions. Matt, for example, said the gay characters were included to highlight 'how thin of a line it can be, you know, between hanging out and just going to dinner and talking about sports and making out with a guy', or what Adam called 'that blurry line between a straight relationship versus a gay relationship'. Thus, the gay characters may have helped to establish the heterosexuality of Peter and Syd's friendship, but they also seem to have led many of our respondents to question what straight male friendship entails.

The men's thoughts about *how* the gay characters were represented were also noteworthy. Most of the men commented on how unusual the depictions of the gay characters were in avoiding common stereotypes of gay men as 'flamboyant' and/or 'effeminate'. Andy Samberg's portrayal of Robbie as a confident jock was particularly novel for the men. 'I'd say I was surprised when, you know, they talk about him being gay in the movie', Joe said. 'I mean, I wasn't expecting that; he just really didn't act like it or look like it'. A few men, however, including most of the 'traditionalists', made a point of drawing a distinction between Doug, whom they found to be a more 'realistic' depiction of a gay man, and Robbie. Of Robbie, traditionalist Thomas said, 'I didn't think that was realistic at all – he had the title of gay but nothing else, you know, pointed to that'. When asked what gay guys are like, he replied,

> Definitely more involved with their emotions and not afraid to talk about their emotions, see, and definitely more feminine – and I don't mean this in a mean way, cuz I don't have any personal hatred toward gay guys or whatever; you are who [you are]. I think you're born that way, to be honest, but just the way they walk, the way they dress, definitely wear flip flops, style their hair, um, tight clothes.

That many of the men most uncomfortable with Peter's gender performance also didn't find Robbie to be a 'realistic' gay man suggests their subscription to a definition of masculinity that is comfortably incompatible with homosexuality. Robbie's conventional masculinity, for example, confounded Colin, who initially identified Robbie as the character that 'was closest to the normal'. When he eventually remembered that Robbie was gay, however, he laughed nervously and changed his mind: 'So I guess Syd would be most normal'.

In contrast to traditionalists like Colin and Thomas, most of the men, including the ambivalent bros, were notably invested in the idea of Robbie being 'a realistic gay person'. Many respondents found Robbie to be an extremely appealing character, describing him as 'laid-back and in control', 'calm, cool and collected' and 'self-confident'. As Jason, a 19-year-old business major, said, 'I mean, obviously he was a gay man in there, but he seemed like such a cool guy'. For many of them, their enjoyment of the film seemed legitimated, and their gay-friendly self-perception confirmed, by their acceptance of *I Love You, Man*'s unconventional representation of gay men as realistic, normal, good and positive – terms that became potently interchangeable in their responses. Ryan stated,

> I don't think they were represented negatively. I think it was accurate from what my experience is with what gay people are. I actually thought that was kinda good cuz I actually think I might have been offended if it had been a negative portrayal of them because of the gay friends that I have.

Ryan's perspective was echoed by many of the men, including the ambivalent bros. Matt explained,

> I thought they were pretty realistic. The character of Robbie, I think, was a really good character just because I think it shows a lot of people that, like, maybe being gay isn't that, like, abnormal, whereas he was probably one of the most down-to-earth characters who had plenty of guy friends, you know. Yeah, [he] was still gay, [but he also] seemed like one of the more normal characters in the movie. So I feel that that was kind of good for the movie to portray a homosexual as being more normal than the extreme.

Such comments reflect an assumption that Robbie's 'normal' guy qualities make him 'realistic' – or at least they reflect a strong desire for that to be true. And while many of the men stated that they think such a representation is a 'good' thing for gay people, it also seemed to be a 'good' thing for these men.

Robbie, we argue, served an important function for many respondents who were anxious to reconcile their investment in certain norms of traditional manhood with their investment in escaping those norms. Most men understood themselves to be very accepting of homosexuality. In completing a survey of male norms, 34 of the 38 respondents either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement, 'A man should not continue a friendship with another man if he finds out that the man is a homosexual'. That item's average was a 1.82 on a 7-point scale (1 being strongly disagree). Only one item, 'Hugging and kissing should always lead to intercourse', ranked lower (1.55). In contrast, the average for 'Boys should be encouraged to find a means of demonstrating physical prowess' was 4.05. Almost all of the men had openly

gay family members or friends (though none of their closest friends were openly gay). The men's attitudes about homosexuality, however, could be highly complicated. All but a handful admitted to using 'the fag discourse' (Pascoe 2007: viii) when interacting with their friends (although very few said they would use it in reference to a gay person), none said they would use it when a gay person was around and many stated that they were using it less, or not at all, as they matured. When asked how they would feel if their best friend came out to them, answers ranged from 'I would be completely fine with that' (Jason) to 'I would be taken aback a bit. Still be my friend obviously. He obviously knows I'm not gay, so, like, he wouldn't be trying to pull anything weird on me. I don't know. It kinda depends on how he acted when he was gay' (John). When asked to identify which scenes they found most funny and which they found most weird or uncomfortable, the scene in which Doug kisses Peter at the end of their man date was mentioned most. Five listed it as among the funniest; eleven as the most uncomfortable (which included all of the 'traditionalists'). By comparison, the tallies for other oft-mentioned scenes include Peter vomiting at the poker party (nine funny, three uncomfortable); Peter's failed attempts to create nicknames (seven funny, three uncomfortable); Syd's sexually risqué toast (one funny, seven uncomfortable); and Syd identifying the guy farting (five funny, one uncomfortable).

It became clear that many of the men were concerned less about homosexuality per se than about how gay men 'acted'. When asked to rate how gay-friendly they were on a scale of 1 to 10, most said 7 or 8. When asked what kept them from being higher, many men echoed Cameron's answer:

> I have absolutely nothing wrong with gays, like gay rights – I'll support that. They're just as equally human beings. I completely support that. I just don't necessarily feel comfortable, if I was in a room with a gay man and he was being extra flamboyant, I feel, like, a little bit more uncomfortable, so, um, there are types of homosexuals that I do steer away from, like the really, really just loud, like, obnoxious ones. I don't know. I definitely don't have a problem with homosexuals; I'm comfortable talking, even comfortable being friends with [them], just, um, it's more like on a person-to-person basis. It's not homosexuals in general. Like if I were to meet somebody and I really liked them and then found out they were gay, I'd be like, 'Ok, that'. It'll change things a little bit, but if I like them for who they are, we have common interests, I'll be friends with them. I think that's where the 7 can come in; it's on a person-to-person basis.

Cameron's comments reflect the kind of struggle many of the men, especially the ambivalent bros, face as they try to square traditional norms of how men should act (not 'loud' or 'flamboyant'; have certain 'interests') with the emerging imperative to be cool with gay guys. As a normatively masculine gay guy – the kind of gay guy they could imagine being close friends with – Robbie helps to reconcile the tension. When asked why he thought Robbie and Doug were included, Jeremy summarized an important lesson of *I Love You, Man*'s bromance story for ambivalent bros: 'I guess just to give that aspect of friendship, like being friends with homosexuals, like he went on a date with that gay guy and then he included him in his wedding party. [Robbie and Doug] were cool and stuff'.

CONCLUSION

Talking with these straight-identified men helps us to better understand how they negotiate the shifting sociocultural terrain wherein norms of traditional manhood exist alongside and are woven within various critiques of them. All of the respondents seemed to enjoy the film, but our interviews suggest that its narrative and the bromance discourse laid a more useful path for some men than others, pointing to the uneven ways such forces are experienced. We tried to map out how respondents' differing identification with a certain normative masculinity mattered in this regard. Given the limited diversity of our respondents and the limited background information we had about them, we hesitate to make strong claims about the specific ways that the men's race or class shaped their experience of the tension. Having said that, we would predict that the bromance discourse and *I Love You, Man* speak most directly to the '"lived" ideological dilemmas' (Korobov 2005: 243) of middle- and upper-class, straight, white men. None of the black men we interviewed, for example, were active users of the bromance discourse, and none of the three men who distanced themselves from their upper-middle-class peers fit within the ambivalent bros group. In these regards, our observations echo studies that suggest hybrid masculinities (and the capital tied to them) are more accessible to men who are privileged on other axes (Roberts 2014).

We would also argue that *I Love You, Man*'s bromance speaks to the post-closet logic of a generation more comfortable with homosexuality and more confident in the stability of straight and gay identities. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and others have helped us to understand how a blurry line between homosociality and homosexuality long structured heterosexual masculinity. In the context of systemic homophobia, that fuzziness generates deep anxieties that fuel practices of homophobic othering and disavowal. Critics have often identified such practices in bromance narratives (e.g. gay characters being used to secure a main character's heterosexuality; an insistent disavowal of homoeroticism) (Greven 2010, 2014; Alberti 2013; Boyle and Berridge 2014). Our interviews, however, suggest that if we rely too heavily on theoretically informed textual readings, we run the risk of overestimating the anxiety men feel about that line and the (in)stability of their heterosexual male identity. Given the way that Robbie troubles the heteronormative boundary between gay and straight (e.g. he is more conventionally masculine than Peter or Syd; he successfully hits on straight guys at his gym), he could potentially be a discomforting character. However, we found little evidence that he was for most of the men.

This is not to say that the men embraced a queer understanding of (hetero) sexuality. In fact, we would argue the opposite: they seemed fully confident that the boundary between their straight identity and other men's gay identities was certain and settled. Operating within this post-closet logic, many of the men understood the line between homosociality and homosexuality to be thin rather than blurry and seemed neither especially concerned about it nor invested in practices of disavowal. Confident that they were on the straight side of a thin but stable line, many respondents were more comfortable acknowledging and playing with the queerer aspects of homosocial desire and intimacy. They also seemed more willing to adopt the hybrid masculinities reflected in Peter and Syd, a fact that supports Eric Anderson's argument that a decline in homohysteria is reconfiguring constructions of manhood (Anderson 2009).

Sociologists have debated how to assess the political nature of hybrid masculinities. To Eric Anderson and Mark McCormack (2014), such emerging

masculinities signal a more 'inclusive' gender system. They argue that the traditional form of manhood persists but no longer operates as the hegemonic lynchpin in a stratified gender order. Instead, they see a proliferation of esteemed masculinities and predict a further decline in gender polarization, misogyny and homophobia as more men engage in once gender-renegade behaviours (Anderson and McCormack 2014). Other scholars argue that Anderson and McCormack are overly optimistic. They frame such new practices as strategies of hegemonic recuperation: the co-optation of 'feminine' or 'gay' practices by white, middle-class, straight masculinity helping to maintain patriarchal, heterosexist, racial and class domination by obscuring continued inequalities behind ostensibly 'softer' masculinities (Carroll 2011; Ingram and Waller 2014; Roberts 2014). Paul Simpson, for example, argues that Anderson 'overstates' the decline of homophobia and interprets increased gay-friendliness among young men as a 'form of civil indifference' or insincere efforts to be cool rather than the seeds of a 'substantive erotic democracy' (2014: 70).

Living in the midst of social change can be riddled with contradictions (Hall 1996; Larrain 1996; Demetriou 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). And for those interested in challenging patriarchal and heterosexist constructions of masculinity, assessing the political implications of the masculinities of the men we interviewed and the bromance discourse linked to them is complicated. If the concept of hegemony teaches us anything it is that progress, if it happens, is both enabled and limited by processes of negotiation, and its outcomes are uncertain. Scholars who argue that hybrid masculinities and bromance narratives such as *I Love You, Man* simply repackage traditional masculinity through processes of recuperation remind us to be sceptical. Robbie was, we argue, a useful figure for those men who are anxious to be gay-friendly without sacrificing too much patriarchal capital because he assured them that, as Adam put it, 'Gays don't have to be crossdressers slash effeminate; they can just be regular or at least traditionally regular dudes who just happen to like other dudes'. The progressive capacity of these men's hybrid masculinities is certainly circumscribed by the place they are starting from, and it would be further undermined if the 'don't have to be' of this insight operates as a 'shouldn't be'. Such a move would repackage homohysteria as effemiphobia and transphobia and reinforce gender polarization.

It is also important for scholars to recognize where social changes are taking place or are possible. By turning from interpreting texts to engaging with audiences, we learned a great deal about and from the men we interviewed. Most seemed sincerely invested in being gay-friendly, and their attitudes about traditional masculinity and homosexuality were deeply ambivalent and malleable. We certainly recognize that the nature of being interviewed by a professor (one a woman, the other a man they may or may not have known was gay) shaped their responses. So too did the fact that they were interviewed alone. We expect that their discussion of the film or of gay men might have differed had we talked to them in groups or interviewed men and women together, or if we had been able to overhear them talking about those topics among their friends (Pascoe 2007; Flood 2008). Our respondents may have emphasized their ambivalence about traditional masculinity or felt compelled to stress their comfort with homosexuality because they were talking with a professor. Nevertheless, we would hesitate to dismiss their statements as being any less authentic than the interactions they may have with fraternity brothers or female friends. Adam's comment that he 'could become [a bro] in the right situation' suggests that these men move among multiple

contexts and encounter competing constructions of masculinity. Rather than dismiss it as insincere, we argue that men's ambivalence about traditional masculinities represents opportunities for feminist and queer scholars to engage with them in meaningful ways.

REFERENCES

Alberti, John (2013), '*I Love You, Man*: Bromances, the construction of masculinity, and the continuing evolution of the romantic comedy', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 30: 2, pp. 159–72.

Anderson, Eric (2009), *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, New York: Routledge.

Anderson, Eric and McCormack, Mark (2013), 'Theorising masculinities in contemporary Britain', in Steven Roberts (ed.), *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 125–44.

Arxer, Steven L. (2011), 'Hybrid masculine power: Reconceptualizing the relationship between homosociality and hegemonic masculinity', *Humanity & Society*, 35: 4, pp. 390–422.

Ashe, Fidelma (2007), *The New Politics of Masculinity: Men, Power and Resistance*, New York: Routledge.

Becker, Ron (2009), 'Guy love: A queer straight masculinity for a post-closet era?', in Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (eds), *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, New York: Routledge, pp. 121–39.

—— (2014), 'Becoming bromosexual: Straight men, gay men, and male bonding on U.S. TV', in Michael DeAngelis (ed.), *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 233–54.

Bird, Sharon R. (1996), 'Welcome to the men's club: Homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity', *Gender & Society*, 10: 2, pp. 120–32.

Boyle, Karen and Berridge, Susan (2014), 'I love you, man: Gendered narratives of friendship in contemporary Hollywood comedies', *Feminist Media Studies*, 14: 3, pp. 353–68.

Bridges, Tristan (2014), 'A very "gay" straight? Hybrid masculinities, sexual aesthetics, and the changing relationship between masculinity and homophobia', *Gender & Society*, 28: 1, pp. 58–82.

Bridges, Tristan and Pascoe, C. J. (2014), 'Hybrid masculinities: New directions in the sociology of men and masculinities', *Sociology Compass*, 8: 3, pp. 246–58.

Cann, Victoria (2014), 'The limits of masculinity: Boys, taste and cultural consumption', in Steven Roberts (ed.), *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 17–34.

Carroll, Hamilton (2011), *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Chen, Elizabeth J. (2012), 'Caught in a bad bromance', *Texas Journal of Women and the Law*, 21: 2, pp. 241–66.

Connell, R. W. and Messerschmidt, James W. (2005), 'Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept', *Gender & Society*, 19: 6, pp. 829–59.

Curry, Timothy Jon (1991), 'Fraternal bonding in the locker room: A profeminist analysis of talk about competition and women', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8: 2, pp. 119–35.

DeAngelis, Michael (2014), 'Introduction', in Michael DeAngelis (ed.), *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 1–26.

Demetriou, Demetrakis Z. (2001), 'Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique', *Theory and Society*, 30: 3, pp. 337–61.

Flood, Michael (2008), 'Men, sex, and homosociality: How bonds between men shape their sexual relations with women', *Men and Masculinities*, 10: 3, pp. 339–59.

Gill, Rosalind (2007), *Gender and the Media*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gough, Brendan, Hall, Matthew and Seymour-Smith, Sarah (2014), 'Straight guys do wear make-up: Contemporary masculinities and investment in appearance', in Steven Roberts (ed.), *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 106–24.

Greven, David (2010), *Manhood in Hollywood from Bush to Bush*, Austin: University of Texas Press.

—— (2014), 'Fears of a millennial masculinity: *Scream*'s queer killers', in Michael DeAngelis (ed.), *Reading the Bromance: Homosocial Relationships in Film and Television*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 79–106.

Hall, Stuart (1980), 'Encoding/decoding', in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 128–38.

—— (1996), 'The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees', in David Morley and Kuan-Shing Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, pp. 25–46.

Hamburg, John (2009), *I Love You, Man*, USA: DreamWorks SKG.

Ingram, Nicola and Waller, Richard (2014), 'Degrees of masculinity: Working and middle-class undergraduate students' constructions of masculine identities', in Steven Roberts (ed.), *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 35–51.

Kiesling, Scott Fabius (2005), 'Homosocial desire in men's talk: Balancing and re-creating cultural discourses of masculinity', *Language in Society*, 34: 5, pp. 695–726.

Kimmel, Michael S. (2001), 'Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity', in Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (eds), *The Masculinities Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 266–87.

—— (2009), *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, New York: HarperCollins.

Korobov, Neill (2005), 'Ironizing masculinity: How adolescent boys negotiate hetero-normative dilemmas in conversational interaction', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 13: 2, pp. 225–46.

Larrain, Jorge (1996), 'Stuart Hall and the Marxist concept of ideology', in David Morley and Kuan-Shing Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, pp. 47–70.

Lavigne, Carlen (2013), 'Two men and a moustache: Masculinity, nostalgia and bromance in *The Good Guys*', *Journal of Popular Television*, 1: 1, pp. 69–81.

Levant, R. F. and Fischer, J. (1998), 'The male role norms inventory', in Clive M. Davis, William L. Yarber, Robert Bauserman, George Schreer and Sandra L. Davis (eds), *Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 469–71.

Lotz, Amanda D. (2014), *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinity in the 21st Century*, New York: New York University Press.

Marshall, Kelli (2011), 'Bromance and the boys of *Boston Legal*', *Flow Journal*, 13: 7, http://flowjournal.org/2011/01/bromance-and-boston-legal/. Accessed 24 October 2015.

Martino, Wayne (2000), 'Policing masculinities: Investigating the role of homophobia and heteronormativity in the lives of adolescent school boys', *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 8: 2, pp. 213–36.

Messner, Michael (2001), 'Friendship, intimacy, and sexuality', in Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (eds), *The Masculinities Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 253–65.

Muir, Kenneth B. and Seitz, Trina (2004), 'Machismo, misogyny, and homophobia in a male athletic subculture: A participant-observation study of deviant rituals in collegiate rugby', *Deviant Behavior*, 25: 4, pp. 303–27.

Nardi, Peter M. (2007), 'Friendship, sex, and masculinity', in Michael Kimmel (ed.), *The Sexual Self: The Construction of Sexual Scripts*, Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, pp. 49–57.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007), *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Plummer, David (1999), *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*, Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Roberts, Steven (2014), 'Introduction: Masculinities in crisis? Opening the debate', in Steven Roberts (ed.), *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–16.

San Filippo, Maria (2013), 'More than buddies: *Wedding Crashers* and the bromance as comedy of (re)marriage equality', in Timothy Sharry (ed.), *Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 181–99.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1990), *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Simpson, Paul (2014), 'Oppression, acceptance or civil indifference? Middle-aged gay men's accounts of "heterospaces"', in Steven Roberts (ed.), *Debating Modern Masculinities: Change, Continuity, Crisis?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 70–87.

Troyer, John and Marchiselli, Chani (2005), 'Slack, slacker, slackest: Homosocial bonding practices in contemporary dude cinema', in Murray Pomerance and Frances Gateward (eds), *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 264–76.

Ward, Jane (2015), *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men*, New York: New York University Press.

Weber, Christina D. (2010), '"I mean it's awkward anxiety": Exploring the role of sociohistorical context in men's negotiation of masculine subjectivity', *Cultural Studies < Critical Methodologies*, 10: 4, pp. 337–46.

West, Candace and Fenstermaker, Sarah (2011), 'Doing difference', in Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (eds), *The Gendered Society Reader*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 214–36.

Wyatt, Justin (2001), 'Identity, queerness, and homosocial bonding: The case of *Swingers*', in Peter Lehman (ed.), *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture*, New York: Routledge, pp. 51–65.

SUGGESTED CITATION

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Ron Becker is an associate professor in the Department of Media, Journalism and Film and director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at Miami University. He is the author of *Gay TV and Straight America* (Rutgers University Press, 2006) and co-editor of *Saturday Night Live and American TV* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

Contact: Department of Media, Journalism & Film, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056, USA.
E-mail: beckerrp@miamioh.edu

Judith Weiner is a health research analyst for the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Most of her research to date has focused on health communication with a social-influence perspective and interpersonal communication in health-related contexts. Before joining NCIRD, she was an associate professor in the Department of Media, Journalism and Film at Miami University.

Contact: CDC, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, 1600 Clifton Road NE, Roybal Bldg. 24, MS-A27, Atlanta, GA 30329-4027, USA.
E-mail: yjm7@cdc.gov