

**“NO WAY MY BOYS ARE
GOING TO BE LIKE THAT!”
Parents’ Responses to
Children’s Gender Nonconformity**

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Drawing on qualitative interviews with parents of preschool children, the author addresses parental responses to children’s gender nonconformity. The author’s analyses indicate that parents welcome what they perceive as gender nonconformity among their young daughters, while their responses in relation to sons are more complex. Many parents across racial and class backgrounds accept or encourage some tendencies they consider atypical for boys. But this acceptance is balanced by efforts to approximate hegemonic ideals of masculinity. The author considers these patterns in the context of gender as an interactional accomplishment, demonstrating that parents are often consciously aware of their own role in accomplishing gender with and for their sons. Heterosexual fathers are especially likely to be motivated in that accomplishment work by their own personal endorsement of hegemonic masculinity, while heterosexual mothers and gay parents are more likely to be motivated by accountability to others in relation to those ideals.

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Parents begin gendering their children from their very first awareness of those children, whether in pregnancy or while awaiting adoption.

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Children themselves become active participants in this gendering process by the time they are conscious of the social relevance of gender, typically before the age of two. I address one aspect of this process of parents doing gender, both for and with their children, by exploring how parents respond to gender nonconformity among preschool-aged children. As West and Zimmerman (1987, 136) note, "to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*." I argue that many parents make efforts to stray from and thus expand normative conceptions of gender. But for their sons in particular, they balance this effort with conscious attention to producing a masculinity approximating hegemonic ideals. This balancing act is evident across many parents I interviewed regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and partnership status. But I also argue that within that broader pattern are notable variations. Heterosexual fathers play a particularly central role in accomplishing their sons' masculinity and, in the process, reinforce their own as well. Their expressed motivations for that accomplishment work often involve personal endorsement of hegemonic masculinity. Heterosexual mothers and gay parents, on the other hand, are more likely to report motivations that invoke accountability to others for crafting their sons' masculinity in accordance with hegemonic ideals.

Three bodies of literature provide foundations for this argument. Along with the body of work documenting parental behaviors in relation to gendering children, I draw on interactionist approaches that view gender as a situated accomplishment and scholarship outlining the contours of normative conceptions of masculinity. These latter two literatures offer a framework for understanding the significance of the patterns evident in my analysis of interview data.

PARENTS AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Scholars of gender and childhood are increasingly interested in the role of peers in the process of gendering children, viewing children themselves as active agents rather than passive recipients of adult influence. However, they also continue to recognize parents as important in the gendering of children (Coltrane and Adams 1997; Maccoby 1998). Lytton and Romney's (1991) meta-analysis of the substantial quantitative and experimental

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literature on gender and parents' behavior toward their sons and daughters documents that parents do not always enforce gendered expectations for their children, nor do they consistently treat sons and daughters differently. Some researchers have highlighted subgroups of parents who actively seek to disrupt traditional gendered expectations for their children (Quoss, Ellis, and Stromberg 1987; Risman 1998; Risman and Myers 1997; Stacey and Bibliarz 2001). But as a whole, the literature documents definite parental tendencies toward gendered treatment of children. These tendencies are evident beginning at birth and in the early childhood years. For example, the literature indicates differential treatment of sons and daughters in terms of parental selection of toys (Etaugh and Liss 1992; Pomerleau et al. 1990), clothing (Cahill 1989), and décor for children's rooms (Pomerleau et al. 1990), as well as parental emphasis on emotions versus autonomy in family stories (Fiese and Skillman 2000; Reese, Haden, and Fivush 1996). Across this literature, gender typing by parents is well documented, as are two patterns within that gender typing. First, fathers appear to engage in more differential treatment of sons and daughters and more enforcement of gender boundaries than do mothers; second, for both mothers and fathers, such boundary maintenance appears to be more evident in the treatment of sons than daughters (Antill 1987; Coltrane and Adams 1997; Maccoby 1998).

The large literature on gender typing by parents is predominantly quantitative and often based on experiments, closed-ended surveys, and/or counting the frequency of various parental behaviors. This literature is valuable in documenting the role that parents play in gendering their children. However, it does less to explore the nuances of how parents make meaning around gender, to document in detail what kinds of attributes and behaviors are accepted and sanctioned by parents of young children, to reveal what motivates parents as they participate in the social construction of their children's gender, or to illuminate how aware parents are of their role in these processes. Parents are clearly gendering their children, but what are the subtleties of the gendered outcomes they seek to construct, why do they seek to construct those, and how aware are they of that construction process?

DOING GENDER: ACCOMPLISHMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The interactionist approach to gender as accomplishment (West and Fenstermaker 1993, 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987) provides a powerful framework for understanding what I heard about gender nonconformity in my interviews with parents of young children. This approach allows us to

view parents not simply as agents of gender socialization but rather as actors involved in a more complex process of accomplishing gender with and for their children. Along with the notion of gender as accomplished, equally central is the concept of accountability. Accountability is relevant not only when people are doing gender in accordance with the expectations of others but also when they resist or stray from such expectations. This claim, present in West and Zimmerman's (1987) earlier formulation, is one to which Fenstermaker and West (2002) return in defending the approach against criticism that it does not allow for resistance and social change. They note that their focus on the process by which gender is accomplished places activity, agency, and the possibility of resistance in the foreground. But the accomplishment of such change takes place within the context of, and is constrained by, accountability to gendered assessment. Fenstermaker and West (2002, 212) have recently argued that accountability is "the most neglected aspect of our formulation. . . . Few of those who have used our approach have recognized the essential contribution that accountability makes to it."

While accomplishment and accountability are key concepts framing my analysis of parents' responses to their children's gender nonconformity, it is also crucial to note the importance of normative conceptions. Fenstermaker and West (2002) have extended their approach to address not only gender but other categories of difference. "In the accomplishment of difference [including gender], accountability is the driving motivator; the specifics of the normative order provide the content, with social interaction the medium" (Fenstermaker and West 2002, 213-14). They refer to the "content" provided by the normative order as *normative conceptions* and view these as historically and locally variable. Normative conceptions of appropriate masculine conduct are particularly relevant to my analysis, and to explore that domain, I turn briefly to scholarship on the history of masculinity as a social construct.

NORMATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF MASCULINITY: HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Connell (1995, 77) has argued persuasively that "at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted." This hegemonic masculinity is cross-culturally and historically variable and offers a clear example of a locally specific normative conception of gender. It stands as a normative conception to which men are accountable, a form of masculinity in relation to which subordinated masculinities, as well as feminini-

ties, are defined. Connell (1987, 187) argues that there is no need for a concept of hegemonic femininity, because the fundamental purpose of hegemonic masculinity is to legitimate male domination. The subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities is crucial as well, as it allows hegemonic masculinity to legitimate not only male privilege but also race, class, and sexual orientation-based privileges as well.

Several elements of Connell's theory are especially relevant to my analysis of how parents think about their preschool sons' gender nonconformity. He argues that among the features of hegemonic masculinity in this particular time and place are aggression, limited emotionality, and heterosexuality. In addition, he and other scholars interested in the social construction of masculinity emphasize its relational meaning: " 'masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity' " (Connell 1995, 68). As Kimmel notes, the "notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical constructions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is" (1994, 119). Passivity and excessive emotionality, as well as more material adornments of femininity, are precisely what must be avoided in this hegemonic version of masculinity. Both Connell and Kimmel view homophobia as central to this rejection of femininity. Connell (1987, 186) states this bluntly when he notes that "the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual. . . . Contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men . . . is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity."

DATA AND METHOD

Participants and Interviewing

The analyses presented here are based on data from 42 interviews with a diverse sample of parents, each of whom has at least one preschool-aged child (three to five years old). Interviews focused on parents' perceptions of their children's gendered attributes and behaviors. The preschool age range is emphasized because this is the period when most children begin to develop a clear understanding of the gender expectations around them, as evidenced in the development of gender identity and the tendency to engage in more gender-typed patterns of behavior (Maccoby 1998; Weinraub et al. 1984).

Interviews were conducted primarily in southern and central Maine (with a small number conducted elsewhere in New England), over a period ranging from the summer of 1999 to the fall of 2002. Participants were

recruited through postings in local child care centers, parents' resource organizations, community colleges, local businesses, and public housing projects and through personal networks (though none of the participants were people I knew prior to the interviews). Recruiting materials included general reference to "parents' experiences raising sons and daughters" and did not emphasize gender conformity or nonconformity. Thus, recruitment was focused not on trying to find parents struggling with significant gender-related issues but rather on finding a cross-section of parents. None of those eventually participating reported seeking any professional intervention related to their children's gender identity or gendered behaviors.

The process of participation began with a brief written questionnaire, which was followed by a semistructured interview. Particular emphasis was on a focal child between the ages of three and five, although questions were asked about any other children the respondents lived with as well. The major focus of the interview questions was on the current activities, toys, clothes, behaviors, and gender awareness of the focal child and the parents' perceptions of the origins of these outcomes, as well as their feelings about their children's behaviors and characteristics in relation to gendered expectations. Interviews ended with some general questions about the desirability and feasibility of gender neutrality in childhood. The interviews were taped and transcribed, although some minor smoothing of quotes used in the analyses presented below was conducted to increase clarity. The length of interviews was generally from one to two hours. Most interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes, but 7 of the 42 interviewees preferred their place of employment or some other neutral site such as a restaurant or my office. Even for those interviews conducted in the home, it is important to note that sometimes a child or children were present and other times not. Therefore, I had no consistent opportunity to observe parents' behavior with their children. The project focuses on parents' perceptions and self-reports, and I am not able to compare those to evidence on actual parental behavior. Interviews were conducted either by myself or by a research assistant. Participants were paid a modest honorarium (\$25 to \$35, depending on the year of the interview) for their time and participation, funded by a series of small internal research grants, and were ensured complete confidentiality.

The 42 interviewees include 24 mothers and 18 fathers. Four of the fathers are married to women interviewed for the study as mothers. Although geographically specific primarily to northern New England, interviewees come from a relatively diverse range of family types (single-parent and two-parent families, with some of the latter being blended families), class

locations (ranging from those self-identifying as poor/low income to upper middle class), racial/ethnic groups (including white, Asian American, and African American interviewees), and sexual orientations (including heterosexual and gay parents).¹ These parents' children include biological children, adopted children, step-children, and foster children. Interviewees' educational backgrounds range from having completed less than a high school education to holding a doctorate, with the average years of formal schooling falling between high school graduate and college graduate. Ages range from 23 to 49 years, with the average age at 35 years. All of the men interviewed work outside the home for pay; among those in heterosexual partnerships, their female partners were roughly equally split among full-time homemakers, those employed part-time in the paid labor force, and those employed full-time. Among the mothers interviewed, about one in three are full-time homemakers, with the remainder employed part-time or full-time in the paid labor force. Interviewees average 2.5 children (with the mode being 2) and are split among those having only daughters (11), only sons (12), or at least one of each (23). The focal children on whom interviews focused include 22 sons and 20 daughters.

Coding and Analysis

I began with a general interest in how parents responded to gender nonconformity, but otherwise my reading and rereading of the transcripts was inductive, coding for issues addressed by all interviewees in response to the structure of the questions as well as for other themes that arose. For the particular focus of this analysis, parental responses to perceived gender nonconformity, I began by identifying all instances in which a parent commented on items, activities, attributes, or behaviors—whether actual or hypothetical—of one of their children as more typical of a child of the other sex. Given that many of the interview questions specifically addressed whether the parent considers their child(ren)'s toys, clothes, activities, and attributes stereotypically gender linked, much of the interview focused on the parents' perception of gender typicality and atypicality. As a result, for the coding relevant to this analysis, I did not identify particular activities or attributes as stereotypically male or female. Instead, I was able to focus only on instances in which the parent himself or herself explicitly noted something as more typical of the other sex, allowing me to document what parents themselves view as atypical. Most of these mentions involved actual instances of perceived nonconformity, but some involved hypothetical outcomes.

Among these mentions of gender atypicality or nonconformity, I then narrowed my focus to just those quotes addressing a parental response. Such responses fell into two broad groups: feelings and actions related to gender nonconformity. Parental feelings were defined as any reported emotional response and were further divided into positive/neutral (e.g., "I love it," "I think it's great," "it's fine with me") versus negative (e.g., "I worry about . . .," "it bothers me when . . ."). Actions were defined as reports of actually doing something about gender nonconformity, acting in some way to either encourage or discourage it. These too were coded as positive/neutral versus negative. Examples of positive and neutral actions include actively encouraging use of an atypical toy or just allowing something atypical because the child really wanted it. Negative actions included a range of reported efforts to discourage or even forbid gender-atypical choices. Once I had coded all of the transcripts for these categories, I coded each interviewee for whether his or her responses to perceived gender nonconformity were all positive/neutral, all negative, or a combination of both. This coding was done separately for sons and daughters because the patterns of positive/neutral and negative responses varied markedly by the child's gender. On the basis of that coding, I decided to focus this article primarily on parents' responses regarding their sons.

Combinations of positive/neutral and negative responses toward children's gender nonconformity varied by gender of child and gender of parent. But they did not vary consistently by parents' racial/ethnic background or class location, perhaps indicating that geographic similarity outweighs such variation in my particular sample. Scholars of gender have clearly documented the inseparability of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, and I endeavor to consider each within the context of my interview data. But it is also important to note that the size of my interview sample limits my ability to fully consider those intersections. While some variations by race and class are evident within the broader interview project from which this particular analysis is drawn, such variations are generally absent in terms of parental responses to gender nonconformity. Therefore, although I indicate the race, class, and sexual orientation of each parent quoted, I analyze variations only by sexual orientation, and only when those are evident.

RESPONSES TO GENDER NONCONFORMITY

Mothers and fathers, across a variety of social locations, often celebrated what they perceived as gender nonconformity on the part of their young daughters. They reported enjoying dressing their daughters in sports-

themed clothing, as well as buying them toy cars, trucks, trains, and building toys. Some described their efforts to encourage, and pleased reactions to, what they considered traditionally male activities such as t-ball, football, fishing, and learning to use tools. Several noted that they make an effort to encourage their young daughters to aspire to traditionally male occupations and commented favorably on their daughters as “tomboyish,” “rough and tumble,” and “competitive athletically.” These positive responses were combined with very little in the way of any negative response. The coding of each interviewee for the combination of positive/neutral and negative responses summarizes this pattern clearly: Among parents commenting about daughter(s), the typical combination was to express only positive responses. For example, a white, middle-class, heterosexual mother noted approvingly that her five-year-old daughter “does a lot of things that a boy would do, and we encourage that,” while a white, upper-middle-class, lesbian mother reported that she and her partner intentionally “do [a lot] of stuff that’s not stereotypically female” with their daughter. Similarly, a white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father indicated with relief that his daughter is turning out to be somewhat “boyish”: “I never wanted a girl who was a little princess, who was so fragile. . . . I want her to take on more masculine characteristics.” An African American, working-class, heterosexual father also noted this kind of preference: “I don’t want her just to color and play with dolls, I want her to be athletic.”

A few parents combined these positive responses with vague and general negative responses. But these were rare and expressed with little sense of concern, as in the case of an African American, low-income, heterosexual mother who offered positive responses but also noted limits regarding her daughter: “I wouldn’t want her to be too boyish, because she’s a girl.” In addition, no parents expressed only negative responses. These various patterns suggest that parents made little effort to accomplish their daughters’ gender in accordance with any particular conception of femininity, nor did they express any notable sense of accountability to such a conception. Instead, parental responses may suggest a different kind of gendered phenomenon closely linked to the pattern evident in responses toward sons: a devaluing of traditionally feminine pursuits and qualities. Although many parents of daughters reported positive responses to what they consider typical interests and behaviors for a girl, most also celebrated the addition of atypical pursuits to their daughters’ lives, and very few noted any negative response to such additions.

It is clear in the literature that there are substantial gendered constraints placed on young girls, and any devaluation of the feminine is potentially such a constraint. But the particular constraint of negative responses by

parents to perceived gender nonconformity was not evident in my interview results. It is possible that negative response from parents to perceived departures from traditional femininity would be more notable as girls reach adolescence. Pipher (1998, 286) argues that parents of young girls resist gender stereotypes for their daughters but that "the time to really worry is early adolescence. That's when the gender roles get set in cement, and that's when girls need tremendous support in resisting cultural definitions of femininity." Thorne (1994, 170) invokes a similar possibility, claiming that girls are given more gender leeway than boys in earlier childhood, "but the leeway begins to tighten as girls approach adolescence and move into the heterosexualized gender system of teens and adults." The question of whether negative parental responses might be less gender differentiated in adolescence cannot be addressed with my interview data and remains instead an intriguing question for future research.

In stark contrast to the lack of negative response for daughters, 23 of 31 parents of sons expressed at least some negative responses, and 6 of these offered only negative responses regarding what they perceived as gender nonconformity. Of 31 parents, 25 did indicate positive responses as well, but unlike references to their daughters, they tended to balance those positive feelings and actions about sons with negative ones as well.² The most common combination was to indicate both positive and negative responses.

Domestic Skills, Nurturance, and Empathy

Parents accepted, and often even celebrated, their sons' acquisition of domestic abilities and an orientation toward nurturance and empathy. Of the 25 parents of sons who offered positive/neutral responses, 21 did so in reference to domestic skills, nurturance, and/or empathy. For example, they reported allowing or encouraging traditionally girl toys such as dolls, doll houses, kitchen centers, and tea sets, with that response often revolving around a desire to encourage domestic competence, nurturance, emotional openness, empathy, and nonviolence as attributes they considered nontraditional but positive for boys. These parents were reporting actions and sentiments oriented toward accomplishing gender in what they considered a less conventional manner. One white, low-income, heterosexual mother taught her son to cook, asserting that "I want my son to know how to do more than boil water, I want him to know how to take care of himself." Another mother, this one a white, working-class, heterosexual parent, noted that she makes a point of talking to her sons about emotions: "I try to instill a sense of empathy in my sons and try to get them to see how other people would feel." And a white, middle-class, heterosexual father emphasized domestic

competence when he noted that it does not bother him for his son to play with dolls at his cousin's house: "How then are they going to learn to take care of their children if they don't?" This positive response to domestic activities is consistent with recent literature on parental coding of toys as masculine, feminine, or neutral, which indicates that parents are increasingly coding kitchens and in some cases dolls as neutral rather than exclusively feminine (Wood, Desmarais, and Gugula 2002).

In my study, mothers and fathers expressed these kinds of efforts to accomplish gender differently for their sons with similar frequency, but mothers tended to express them with greater certainty, while fathers were less enthusiastic and more likely to include caveats. For example, this mother described her purchase of a variety of domestic toys for her three-year-old son without ambivalence: "One of the first big toys [I got him] was the kitchen center. . . . We cook, he has an apron he wears. . . . He's got his dirt devil vacuum and he's got his baby [doll]. And he's got all the stuff to feed her and a highchair" (white, low-income, heterosexual mother).

Some mothers reported allowing domestic toys but with less enthusiasm, such as a white, low-income, heterosexual mother who said, regarding her three-year-old son, "He had been curious about dolls and I just said, you know, usually girls play with dolls, but it's okay for you to do it too." But this kind of caution or lack of enthusiasm, even in a response coded as positive or neutral due to its allowance of gender-atypical behavior, was more evident among fathers, as the following quote illustrates: "Occasionally, if he's not doing something, I'll encourage him to maybe play with his tea cups, you know, occasionally. But I like playing with his blocks better anyway" (white, middle-class, heterosexual father).

Thus, evident among both mothers and fathers, but with greater conviction for mothers, was widespread support among parents for working to "undo" gender at the level of some of their sons' skills and values. However, this acceptance was tempered for many parents by negative responses to any interest in what I will refer to as iconic feminine items, attributes, or activities, as well as parental concern about homosexuality.

Icons of Femininity

A range of activities and attributes considered atypical for boys were met with negative responses, and for a few parents (3 of 31 parents of sons) this even included the kind of domestic toys and nurturance noted above. But more common were negative responses to items, activities, or attributes that could be considered icons of femininity. This was strikingly consistent with Kimmel's (1994, 119) previously noted claim that the "notion of anti-femininity

lies at the heart of contemporary and historical constructions of manhood," and it bears highlighting that this was evident among parents of very young children. Parents of sons reported negative responses to their sons' wearing pink or frilly clothing; wearing skirts, dresses, or tights; and playing dress up in any kind of feminine attire. Nail polish elicited concern from a number of parents too, as they reported young sons wanting to have their fingernails or toenails polished. Dance, especially ballet, and Barbie dolls were also among the traditionally female activities often noted negatively by parents of sons. Of the 31 parents of sons, 23 mentioned negative reactions to at least one of these icons.

In relation to objects such as clothing and toys, the following responses are typical of the many concerns raised and the many indications of actions parents had taken to accomplish gender with and for their sons:

He's asked about wearing girl clothes before, and I said no. . . . He likes pink, and I try not to encourage him to like pink just because, you know, he's not a girl. . . . There's not many toys I wouldn't get him, except Barbie, I would try not to encourage that. (white, low-income, heterosexual mother)

If we go into a clothing store . . . I try to shy my son away from the Power Puff Girls shirt or anything like that. . . . I would steer him away from a pink shirt as opposed to having him wear a blue shirt. (Asian American, middle-class, heterosexual father)

These quotes are typical of many instances in which parents not only specify the items that strike them as problematic but clearly indicate the actions they take in accomplishing gender. In the first quote, the mother indicates her actions in encouraging and discouraging various outcomes, while in the second, the father reports "shying away" and "steering" his young son.

Playing with nail polish and makeup, although tolerated by some parents, more often evoked negative responses like this one, from a white, upper-middle-class, gay father, speaking about his four-year-old son's use of nail polish: "He put nail polish on himself one time, and I said 'No, you can't do that, little girls put nail polish on, little boys don't.' "

Barbie dolls are an especially interesting example in that many parents reported positive responses to baby dolls, viewing these as encouraging nurturance and helping to prepare sons for fatherhood. Barbie, on the other hand, an icon of femininity, struck many parents of sons as more problematic. Barbie was often mentioned when parents were asked whether their child had ever requested an item or activity more commonly associated with the other gender. Four parents—three mothers and one father—indicated

that they had purchased a Barbie at their son's request, but more often parents of sons noted that they would avoid letting their son have or play with Barbie dolls. Sometimes this negative response was categorical, as in the quote above in which a mother of a three-year-old son noted that "there's not many toys I wouldn't get him, except Barbie." A father offers a similar negative reaction to Barbie in relation to his two young sons: "If they asked for a Barbie doll, I would probably say no, you don't want [that], girls play with [that], boys play with trucks" (white, middle-class, heterosexual father).

In other cases, parents reported that they would compromise in ways that strike me as designed to minimize Barbie's iconic status. These instances are particularly pointed examples of carefully crafted parental accomplishment of gender: "I would ask him 'What do you want for your birthday?' . . . and he always kept saying Barbie. . . . So we compromised, we got him a NASCAR Barbie" (white, middle-class, heterosexual mother).

Another father reported that his five-year-old son likes to play Barbies with his four-year-old sister and expressed relief that his son's interest is more in Ken than Barbie: "He's not interested in Barbie, he's interested in Ken. . . . He plays with Ken and does boy things with him, he has always made clear that he likes Ken. . . . If he was always playing with dolls and stuff like this then I would start to worry and try to do something to turn it around. But he plays with Ken and it doesn't go much further than that, so I'm fine" (white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father).

Notable throughout these comments is the sense that parents are carefully balancing an openness to some crossing of gender boundaries but only within limits, as the father in the final quote indicated when he said that he would "do something to turn it around" if his son's interest were in Barbie rather than Ken. A similar balancing act in the accomplishment of masculinity is evident for a white, middle-class, heterosexual father who noted that if his son "really wanted to dance, I'd let him . . . , but at the same time, I'd be doing other things to compensate for the fact that I signed him up for dance."

Along with material markers of femininity, many parents expressed concern about excessive emotionality (especially frequent crying) and passivity in their sons. For example, a white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father, concerned about public crying, said about his five-year-old son, "I don't want him to be a sissy. . . . I want to see him strong, proud, not crying like a sissy." Another father expressed his frustration with his four-year-old son's crying over what the father views as minor injuries and indicated action to discourage those tears: "Sometimes I get so annoyed, you know, he comes [crying], and I say, 'you're not hurt, you don't even know what

hurt is yet,' and I'm like 'geez, sometimes you are such a little wean,' you know?" (white, middle-class, heterosexual father).

Passivity was also raised as a concern, primarily by fathers. For example, one white, middle-class, heterosexual father of a five-year-old noted that he has told his son to "stop crying like a girl," and also reported encouraging that son to fight for what he wants: "You just go in the corner and cry like a baby. I don't want that. If you decide you want [some] thing, you are going to fight for it, not crying and acting like a baby and hoping that they're going to feel guilty and give it to you."

A mother who commented negatively about passivity even more directly connected her concern to how her son might be treated: "I do have concerns. . . . He's passive, not aggressive. . . . He's not the rough and tumble kid, and I do worry about him being an easy target" (white, working-class, heterosexual mother).

Taken together, these various examples indicate clearly the work many parents are doing to accomplish gender with and for their sons in a manner that distances those sons from any association with femininity. This work was not evident among all parents of sons. But for most parents, across racial, class, and sexual orientation categories, it was indeed evident.

Homosexuality

Along with these icons of feminine gender performance, and arguably directly linked to them, is the other clear theme evident among some parents' negative responses to perceived gender nonconformity on the part of their sons: fear that a son either would be or would be perceived as gay. Spontaneous connections of gender nonconformity and sexual orientation were not evident in parents' comments about daughters, nor among gay and lesbian parents, but arose for 7 of the 27 heterosexual parents who were discussing sons. The following two examples are typical of responses that invoked the possibility of a son's being gay, with explicit links to performance of femininity and to the parents' own role in accomplishing heterosexuality:

If he was acting feminine, I would ask and get concerned on whether or not, you know, I would try to get involved and make sure he's not gay. (white, low-income, heterosexual mother)

There are things that are meant for girls, but why would it be bad for him to have one of them? I don't know, maybe I have some deep, deep, deep buried

fear that he would turn out, well, that his sexual orientation may get screwed up. (white, middle-class, heterosexual father)

The first comment explicitly indicates that feminine behavior, even in a three-year-old boy, might be an indicator of an eventual nonheterosexual orientation. The second comment raises another possibility: that playing with toys "that are meant for girls" might not indicate but rather shape the son's eventual sexual orientation. In both cases, though, the parent is reporting on actions, either actual or hypothetical, taken to discourage homosexuality and accomplish heterosexuality. Another quote from a father raises a similar concern and further exemplifies parental responsibility for the accomplishment of masculinity as linked to heterosexuality. This father had noted throughout the interview that his five-year-old son tends to show some attributes he considers feminine. At one point, he mentioned that he sometimes wondered if his son might be gay, and he explained his reaction to that possibility in the following terms: "If [he] were to be gay, it would not make me happy at all. I would probably see that as a failure as a dad . . . , as a failure because I'm raising him to be a boy, a man" (white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father). This comment suggests that the parent does not view masculinity as something that naturally unfolds but rather as something he feels responsible for crafting, and he explicitly links heterosexual orientation to the successful accomplishment of masculinity.

The fact that the connection between gender performance and sexual orientation was not raised for daughters, and that fear of homosexuality was not spontaneously mentioned by parents of daughters whether in connection to gender performance or not, suggests how closely gender conformity and heterosexuality are linked within hegemonic constructions of masculinity. Such connections might arise more by adolescence in relation to daughters, as I noted previously regarding other aspects of parental responses to gender nonconformity. But for sons, even among parents of very young children, heteronormativity appears to play a role in shaping parental responses to gender nonconformity, a connection that literature on older children and adults indicates is made more for males than females (Antill 1987; Hill 1999; Kite and Deaux 1987; Sandnabba and Ahlberg 1999). Martin's (2005) recent analysis also documents the importance of heteronormativity in the advice offered to parents by experts. She concludes that expert authors of child-rearing books and Web sites are increasingly supportive of gender-neutral child rearing. But especially for sons, that expert support is limited by implicit and even explicit invocations of homosexuality as a risk to be managed. As McCreary (1994, 526) argues on the basis of experimental work on responses to older children and adults, "the asymme-

try in people's responses to male and female gender role deviations is motivated, in part, by the implicit assumption that male transgressions are symptomatic of a homosexual orientation." This implicit assumption appears to motivate at least some parental gender performance management among heterosexual parents, even for children as young as preschool age. Given the connections between male heterosexuality and the rejection of femininity noted previously as evident in theories of hegemonic masculinity, the tendency for parents to associate gender performance and sexual orientation for sons more than daughters may also reflect a more general devaluation of femininity.

Mothers versus Fathers in the Accomplishment of Masculinity

In documenting parental work to accomplish masculinity with and for young sons, I have focused on the encouragement of domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy; discouragement of icons of femininity; and heterosexual parents' concerns about homosexuality. Within all three of these arenas, variation by parental gender was evident. Although both mothers and fathers were equally likely to express a combination of positive and negative responses to their sons' perceived gender nonconformity, with domestic skills and empathy accepted and icons of femininity rejected, the acceptance was more pointed for mothers, and the rejection was more pointed for fathers. More fathers (11 of 14) than mothers (12 of 17) of sons indicated negative reactions to at least one of the icons discussed. Fathers also indicated more categorically negative responses: 7 of the 14 fathers but only 2 of the 17 mothers reported simply saying "no" to requests for things such as Barbie dolls, tea sets, nail polish, or ballet lessons, whether actual requests or hypothetical ones. Although fewer parents referred to excessive emotionality and passivity as concerns, the 6 parents of sons who did so included 4 fathers and 2 mothers, and here too, the quotes indicate a more categorical rejection by fathers.

Another indication of more careful policing of icons of femininity by fathers is evident in comments that placed age limitations on the acceptability of such icons. Four fathers (but no mothers) commented with acceptance on activities or interests that they consider atypical for boys but went on to note that these would bother them if they continued well past the preschool age range. The following quote from a father is typical of these responses. After noting that his four-year-old son sometimes asks for toys he thinks of as "girl toys," he went on to say, "I don't think it will ruin his life at this age but . . . if he was 12 and asking for it, you know, My Little Pony or Barbies,

then I think I'd really worry" (white, middle-class, heterosexual father). While comments like this one were not coded as negative responses, since they involved acceptance, I mention them here as they are consistent with the tendency for fathers to express particular concern about their sons' involvement with icons of femininity.

Three of 15 heterosexual mothers and 4 of 12 heterosexual fathers of sons responded negatively to the possibility of their son's being, or being perceived as, gay. These numbers are too small to make conclusive claims comparing mothers and fathers. But this pattern is suggestive of another arena in which fathers—especially heterosexual fathers—may stand out, especially taken together with another pattern. Implicit in the quotes offered above related to homosexuality is a suggestion that heterosexual fathers may feel particularly responsible for crafting their sons' heterosexual orientation. In addition, in comparison to mothers, their comments are less likely to refer to fears for how their son might be treated by others if he were gay and more likely to refer to the personal disappointment they anticipate in this hypothetical scenario. I return to consideration of these patterns in my discussion of accountability below.

PARENTAL MOTIVATIONS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF MASCULINITY

The analysis I have offered thus far documents that parents are aware of their role in accomplishing gender with and for their sons. Although some parents did speak of their sons as entirely "boyish" and "born that way," many reported efforts to craft a hegemonic masculinity. Most parents expressed a very conscious awareness of normative conceptions of masculinity (whether explicitly or implicitly). Many, especially heterosexual mothers and gay parents, expressed a sense that they felt accountable to others in terms of whether their sons live up to those conceptions. In numerous ways, these parents indicated their awareness that their sons' behavior was at risk of gender assessment, an awareness rarely noted with regard to daughters. Parents varied in terms of their expressed motivations for crafting their sons' masculinity, ranging from a sense of measuring their sons against their own preferences for normative masculinity (more common among heterosexual fathers) to concerns about accountability to gender assessment by peers, other adults, and society in general (more common among heterosexual mothers and gay parents, whether mothers or fathers).

Heterosexual Fathers

Some parents expressed negative feelings about a son's perceived gender nonconformity that were personal, invoking a sense of accountability not so much to other people as to their own moral or normative framework. Among fathers, twice as many expressed personal accountability than accountability toward others (six versus three). Some references that were personal did arise among mothers, such as this response from a white, working-class, heterosexual mother talking about how she would feel if one of her sons asked for a toy more typically associated with girls: "I'd rather have my girls playing with bows and arrows and cowboys and Indians than the boys to play with dolls and dresses and stuff, you know? . . . I don't think it's normal that boys play with dolls and Barbies and dress them, it's not in their gender."

But, as noted, such references to a personal normative framework dominated the negative responses offered by fathers. Among fathers, this was the case for the two major themes documented previously as eliciting negative response: icons of feminine gender performance and homosexuality. For example, one white, middle-class, heterosexual father referred to this general issue in two separate portions of the interview. These comments were in relation to his four-year-old son's interest in what he considered "girly" toys.

Father: I don't want him to be a little "quiffy" thing, you know. . . . It's probably my own insecurities more than anything. I guess it won't ruin his life. . . . It's probably my own selfish feeling of like "no way, no way my kids, my boys, are going to be like that."

Interviewer: Is it a reflection on you as a parent, do you think?

Father: As a male parent, yeah, I honestly do.

This comment suggests the interviewee's belief that fathers are responsible for crafting appropriately masculine sons. A similar sense of responsibility is evident in relation to homosexuality in a quote presented earlier, from the father who indicated that he would see himself as a failure if his son were gay because "he is raising him to be a boy, a man." Sometimes this invocation of a father's own sense of normative gender for his son was offered more casually, as in the case of an Asian American, middle-class, heterosexual father who said regarding his four-year-old son, "I wouldn't encourage him to take ballet or something like that, 'cause I guess in my own mind that's for a girl."

Although not all heterosexual fathers made these kinds of comments, they were more likely than heterosexual mothers or gay and lesbian parents to situate themselves as the reference point in their concerns about gender nonconformity among their sons. Their motivation for accomplishing hegemonic masculinity with and for their sons is more often expressed as personal, a pattern consistent with the role both Connell and Kimmel argue heterosexual men play in maintaining hegemonic masculinity. In some cases, these heterosexual fathers even explicitly judge their success as a father based on the degree to which they are raising adequately masculine sons. This suggests that passing along that normative conception to their sons may be part of how they accomplish their own masculinity. Not just their sons but their own execution of fatherhood in raising those sons are at risk of gender assessment if they do not approximate the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

Heterosexual Mothers, Lesbian Mothers, and Gay Fathers

Heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers were involved in the same balancing act in accomplishing gender with and for their sons, but their expressed motivations tended to invoke accountability to others. Rather than expressing a sense of commitment directly to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, they were more likely to express fear for how their sons would be assessed by others if they did not approximate that ideal. The focus was more often on the child and the others to whom they assumed their son's gender performance would be accountable rather than on the parent. Some heterosexual fathers did express concern about accountability to others, but as noted previously, such concerns were outnumbered two to one by their references to their own normative framework. But for heterosexual mothers and gay and lesbian parents, explanations for concern more often invoked accountability in terms of how others might react to breaches both of the icons of femininity and of heteronormativity. It is also worth noting that very few of the parents reported experiencing any specific problems for their young sons. Instead, they seemed to view this preschool age as an important, foundational moment in accomplishing their sons' gender, often projecting into the future as they expressed concern about the risk of gender assessment.

Among both heterosexual and lesbian mothers, a substantial number (11 of 17 mothers of sons) expressed fear that their sons might be treated negatively by adults and/or their peers if they did not approximate hegemonic masculinity. One mother indicated that she would encourage her three-

year-old son to wear styles and colors of clothing typically associated with boys, explaining her reasoning in terms of her fear for how her son would feel if others treated him negatively: "This stupid world cares about what we look like, unfortunately. . . . You know, it shouldn't, probably shouldn't matter. It's a piece of cloth, but that's the way the world is and I wouldn't want him to feel out of place" (white, low-income, heterosexual mother).

About half of such comments by mothers referred in this way to society in general, or the adult world, while the other half referred to peers. Six mothers of sons referred to peers, whether through explicit mention of other children or more implicitly through the use of language suggestive of children's peer groups, while only two fathers did so. The following quote is typical of the various responses invoking the risk of gender assessment within a son's peer group: "I would worry if he had too many feminine characteristics, that would worry me. I just want him to be a boy and play with the boys, not to like girl things. If he did that, the boys would think he's weird, and then he'd be lonely" (African American, low-income, heterosexual mother).

Another mother offered a particularly dramatic example of her sense of accountability to others, in this case with concern expressed both for her son and herself, when describing an incident that occurred about a year before the interview. Her son was two years old at the time and sustained an injury while playing dress up with his older sister. He was dressed in a pink princess costume, and once they arrived at the hospital, the mother began to feel concerned about gender assessment:

People can be so uptight about things, I was worried they were going to think I was some kind of nut and next thing you know, send a social worker in. . . . You never know what people will think, and in a hospital, someone has the power to go make a phone call to a social worker or someone, someone who doesn't realize he's two years old and it doesn't matter. . . . It was totally obvious that it was a little boy dressing up in silly clothing but there are people out there who would think that's really wrong, and I was afraid. (white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual mother)

A sense of accountability regarding the reactions of others was expressed in relation to sexual orientation as well. When heterosexual mothers raised the issue, they were more likely to invoke fear regarding the reactions of others. In fact, all three mothers who were coded as offering a negative response to the possibility of a son's being gay or being perceived as gay included at least some reference to concern about the reactions that her child might have to face from others, while all four fathers who were coded in this

category included at least some reference to their own personal negative reactions, as documented in the previous section.³ Typical of mothers' concerns is the following quote, which refers to a son's being perceived as gay if he does not conform to masculine expectations (but others also referred to fears for a son who actually does grow up to identify as gay): "If he's a nurse or something he must be gay, you know, [people] label you instantly that there must be something wrong with you if you're doing this 'cause men should be like construction workers and women should be nurses and things like that. Yeah, it's very difficult in society. . . . I don't want people to think something of me that I'm not. I don't want them to think that on my children either, I don't want my children to be hurt by that in the future, you know?" (white, low-income, heterosexual mother). This comment, and others like it, demonstrates that parents—especially mothers—feel accountable to others in fulfilling heteronormative expectations for their sons and expect that gender nonconformity and sexual orientation will be linked in the assessments those others make of their sons.

Also notable among the comments expressing accountability to others were reports by gay and lesbian parents who felt under particular scrutiny in relation to their sons' (but not their daughters') gender performance. Although my sample is diverse in terms of parents' sexual orientation, all five of the gay and lesbian parents interviewed are white, partnered, and identify as middle or upper middle class. In most ways, their responses to gender nonconformity paralleled those of heterosexual parents. But there are two particular ways in which heterosexual parents differed from gay and lesbian parents. As noted previously, only heterosexual parents raised fears or concerns about their sons' eventual sexual orientation. In addition, four of the five gay and lesbian parents I interviewed had at least one son, and all four of those reported at least some concern that they were held accountable for their sons' gender conformity. One white, upper-middle-class, lesbian mother of two sons noted that she feels "under more of a microscope" and that her sons "don't have as much fluidity" because she has "loaded the dice . . . in terms of prejudice they will face because of who their parents are." Similar sentiments are evident in the following quote from another interviewee: "I feel held up to the world to make sure that his masculinity is in check or something. . . . It's a big rap against lesbian parents, how can you raise sons without a masculine role model in the house, and that's something I always feel up against" (white, upper-middle-class, lesbian mother).

Although stated in less detail, a similar concern is invoked in the following quote from a gay father of a three-year-old son: "I mean I think we have to be a little bit conscious of going too far, you know, as gay men the last

thing we want to do is put him in anything that's remotely girly" (white, middle-class, gay father).

Some past research has emphasized the lack of any variation in gender typing by sexual orientation of parents (Golomboc and Tasker 1994; Gottman 1990; Patterson 1992). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) have more recently offered a compelling case that gay and lesbian parents tend to allow their children more freedom in terms of gendered expectations. But the concern these parents express indicates yet another social price they pay in a homophobic society, and it is one that seems to arise for sons more so than for daughters. I cannot offer any conclusive claims about how gay and lesbian parents feel about gender conformity based on only four interviews. However, the fact that all of the gay and lesbian parents with sons spontaneously mentioned this sense of additional accountability regarding their sons' masculinity offers strong suggestive evidence that gay and lesbian parents feel under particular scrutiny.

Another intriguing pattern in terms of accountability was evident among heterosexual mothers, and this pattern further indicates the unique role that heterosexual fathers play in accomplishing gender for their sons. No specific questions were asked about each interviewee's partner or ex-partner, but 12 of the 15 heterosexual mothers of sons spontaneously mentioned either actual or potential negative reactions to a boy's gender nonconformity on the part of their son's father (while only 2 mentioned any such paternal reactions to a daughter's nonconformity, and of those, one was a positive response by the father). The negative responses these mothers reported are similar to those previously described in quotes from heterosexual fathers themselves. Sometimes these responses were hypothetical, as in the following example: "I love dance, and I would give him the opportunity and let him decide. But I think my husband has a stereotype that boy dancers are more feminine. He definitely, you know, has said that. I don't think he would want his son in ballet" (white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual mother). Other references to fathers' negative responses were reports of actual situations: "My son, when he gets upset, he will cry at any child, boy or girl, and my husband has made the comment about that being, you know, a girl thing, crying like a girl" (white, low-income, heterosexual mother).

One comment offered by a nonpartnered mother resonates with this theme and is interesting in terms of what it suggests about partnership status for heterosexual women. She encourages her sons to play with a wide range of toys, both stereotypically male and stereotypically female ones. But she noted that many other people do not do this and that it would be difficult to encourage most people to relax gender constraints on their sons for the following reason: "I tend to think that you have the most difficulty when you

have fathers around, they're the ones. . . . I have the final say here, but when you've got a husband to deal with it's harder" (white, low-income, heterosexual mother).

This notion is speculative, as it did not arise consistently among non-partnered mothers. But taken together with the frequent mentions of male partners' reactions among heterosexually partnered mothers, it bolsters the contention that accountability to fathers is felt strongly by heterosexual mothers as they assess their sons' gender performance. This may influence their approach to accomplishing gender. For example, one white, middle-class, heterosexual mother recounted defending her clothing purchases to her husband after having a stranger assume her then-infant son was a girl: "I had a few people think the baby was a girl, which is kind of irritating, because I would think 'Oh my God, am I buying clothes that are too feminine looking?' The first time it happened I went right to [my husband] and said 'I bought this in the boys' department at Carter's, I'm telling you, I really did.'"

Another heterosexual mother, this one a white, working-class parent, reported not just defending her actions to her husband but changing a purchase decision based on what her husband might think. When her five-year-old son asked for a Barbie suitcase at the store, she told him, "No, you can't have that, your father wouldn't like it." This mother may be steering her son in a direction that avoids the need for his father to become aware of, or react to, gender-atypical preferences in his son. Direct actions to accomplish masculinity by fathers are certainly evident in my analyses, but accountability to fathers indicates an indirect path through which heterosexual men may further influence the accomplishment of their sons' gender.

CONCLUSION

The interviews analyzed here, with New England parents of preschool-aged children from a diverse array of backgrounds, indicate a considerable endorsement by parents of what they perceive as gender nonconformity among both their sons and their daughters. This pattern at first appears encouraging in terms of the prospects for a world less constrained by gendered expectations for children. Many parents respond positively to the idea of their children's experiencing a greater range of opportunities, emotions, and interests than those narrowly defined by gendered stereotypes, with mothers especially likely to do so. However, for sons, this positive response is primarily limited to a few attributes and abilities, namely, domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy. And it is constrained by a clear

recognition of normative conceptions of masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995). Most parents made efforts to accomplish, and either endorsed or felt accountable to, an ideal of masculinity that was defined by limited emotionality, activity rather than passivity, and rejection of material markers of femininity. Work to accomplish this type of masculinity was reported especially often by heterosexual fathers; accountability to approximate hegemonic masculinity was reported especially often by heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers. Some heterosexual parents also invoked sexual orientation as part of this conception of masculinity, commenting with concern on the possibility that their son might be gay or might be perceived as such. No similar pattern of well-defined normative expectations or accountability animated responses regarding daughters, although positive responses to pursuits parents viewed as more typically masculine may well reflect the same underlying devaluation of femininity evident in negative responses to gender nonconformity among sons.

In the broader study from which this particular analysis was drawn, many parents invoked biology in explaining their children's gendered tendencies. Clearly, the role of biological explanations in parents' thinking about gender merits additional investigation. But one of the things that was most striking to me in the analyses presented here is how frequently parents indicated that they took action to craft an appropriate gender performance with and for their preschool-aged sons, viewing masculinity as something they needed to work on to accomplish. These tendencies are in contrast to what Messner (2000) summarizes eloquently in his essay on a gender-segregated preschool sports program. He observes a highly gender-differentiated performance offered by the boys' and girls' teams during the opening ceremony of the new soccer season, with one of the girls' teams dubbing themselves the Barbie Girls, while one of the boys' teams called themselves the Sea Monsters. He notes that parents tended to view the starkly different approaches taken by the boys and girls as evidence of natural gender differences. "The parents do not seem to read the children's performances of gender as social constructions of gender. Instead, they interpret them as the inevitable unfolding of natural, internal differences between the sexes" (Messner 2000, 770).

I agree with Messner (2000) that this tendency is evident among parents, and I heard it articulated in some parts of the broader project from which the present analysis is drawn. I began this project expecting that parents accept with little question ideologies that naturalize gender difference. Instead, the results I have presented here demonstrate that parents are often consciously aware of gender as something that they must shape and construct, at least for their sons. This argument extends the literature on the routine accomplish-

ment of gender in childhood by introducing evidence of conscious effort and awareness by parents as part of that accomplishment. This awareness also has implications for efforts to reduce gendered constraints on children. Recognition that parents are sometimes consciously crafting their children's gender suggests the possibility that they could be encouraged to shift that conscious effort in less gendered directions.

In addition to documenting this parental awareness, I am also able to extend the literature by documenting the content toward which parents' accomplishment work is oriented. The version of hegemonic masculinity I have argued underlies parents' responses is one that includes both change and stability. Parental openness to domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy as desirable qualities in their sons likely represents social change, and the kind of agency in the accomplishment of gender to which Fenstermaker and West (2002) refer. As Connell (1995) notes, hegemonic masculinity is historically variable in its specific content, and the evidence presented in this article suggests that some broadening of that content is occurring. But the clear limits evident within that broadening suggest the stability and power of hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. The parental boundary maintenance work evident for sons represents a crucial obstacle limiting boys' options, separating boys from girls, devaluing activities marked as feminine for both boys and girls, and thus bolstering gender inequality and heteronormativity.

Finally, along with documenting conscious awareness by parents and the content toward which their accomplishment work is oriented, my analysis also contributes to the literature by illuminating the process motivating parental gender accomplishment. The heterosexual world in general, and heterosexual fathers in particular, play a central role in that process. This is evident in the direct endorsement of hegemonic masculinity many heterosexual fathers expressed and in the accountability to others (presumably heterosexual others) many heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers expressed. Scholarly investigations of the routine production of gender in childhood, therefore, need to pay careful attention to the role of heterosexual fathers as enforcers of gender boundaries and to the role of accountability in the process of accomplishing gender. At the same time, practical efforts to loosen gendered constraints on young children by expanding their parents' normative conceptions of gender need to be aimed at parents in general and especially need to reach heterosexual fathers in particular. The concern and even fear many parents—especially heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers—expressed about how their young sons might be treated if they fail to live up to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity represent a motivation for the traditional accomplishment of

gender. But those reactions could also serve as a motivation to broaden normative conceptions of masculinity and challenge the devaluation of femininity, an effort that will require participation by heterosexual fathers to succeed.

NOTES

1. Details regarding key social locations are as follows: 7 of the interviewees are people of color, and a total of 12 come from families who are of color or are multiracial (including white parents who have adopted children of color); 4 interviewees are poor/low income, 13 working class, 17 middle class, and 8 upper middle class; 5 interviewees are gay, including 2 gay fathers and 3 lesbian mothers.

2. One explanation for the paucity of negative responses could be that a broader range of actions, objects, and attributes are considered appropriate for girls than for boys. But this seems unlikely given that a similar number of parents offered positive or neutral comments about sons and daughters, indicating that they were equally likely to identify a range of actions, attributes, and objects as atypical for each gender.

3. This pattern is also consistent with the results of the literature on heterosexual men's and women's attitudes toward homosexuality, which documents that heterosexual men tend to hold more negative attitudes (Kane and Schippers 1996) and that homophobic attitudes are especially notable toward gay men as compared with lesbians (Herek 2002).

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