FCJ-037 Cute Boys or Game Boys? The Embodiment of Femininity and Masculinity in Young Norwegians' Text Message Love-Projects

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Introduction

2 > The time will come, when Mrs. Smith would spend an hour with Mrs. Brown very enjoyably cutting up Mrs. Robinson over the telephone. (de Sola Pool, 1977: 33, cited in Due, 2003)

3 The telephone was launched in the late 19th century, accompanied by the idea that 'friends will whisper their secrets over the electric wire' (in Due, 2003 [Kingsbury, 1915: 32]).[1] However, as Beathe Due (2003) notes in her compelling analysis of gender-discourses and telephone-usage in Norway, because of already existing social, cultural and economical bourgeois etiquettes, these discourses were transferred into perceptions of correct usage of the telephone by those who could afford to use and own a telephone. Brief and formal business-related conversations were soon initiated by the bourgeois class. (see also Martin, 1991)

4 In the wake of these etiquettes, a gender-dichotomised discourse of telephone-usage became quickly widespread: women were perceived as endlessly gossiping about unimportant matters, whereas men were perceived to have disciplined brief business-related phone-calls.[2] To illustrate the dominant gender-specific discourse, Due (2003) refers to a 1929 letter from a reader who sought to organise a new association against female telephone gossip: 'F.T.M.A.K.E.S.I.O.T' – 'Foreningen Til Motarbeidelse Av Kvinners Evindelige Snakk I Offentlige Telefoner' ('The Association of Opposing Women's Endless Gossip On Public Telephones') (2003: 1).

5 Today in Norway, more than a century after the telephone was launched, the public telephone booth has been generally replaced by the tiny personal, portable mobile phone. Hence, in addition to mobile phone gossiping in public during the last seven or eight years, sending text messages has been one of the most popular communication forms among young people between fifteen to nineteen years old. Statistics show that more than eight million text messages are sent every day. Since Norway has only 4,5 millions inhabitants, the Norwegians are considered to be amongst the highest text message users in the world (Ling, 2004). Hence, criticism of women endlessly gossiping in public telephone booths has been supplanted by criticisms of girls and women who, using mobile phones, shamelessly share their most intimate and personal matters in public space. It is framed as a double problem: mobile telephone gossiping accompanied by text message-addiction. To illustrate the extent to which text messages engage young people, I asked this study's young informants how they would experience two weeks without their mobile telephones. In response, some expressed the idea that it would be 'completely impossible', 'exhausting' or that they 'would be totally isolated' and 'would feel naked and lose the control of the outside world'; in contrast, others said: 'bloody wonderful', 'a relief', 'would release the social hypnosis', 'okay to get away from everyday hassle ' and 'awesome'. Despite the contradictions in these expressions, there is no doubt that text messages engage young people's lives to a large extent.

6 As very few studies have engaged with the way in which gender and sexuality are played out at a micro-textual level of text messages, I have sought, using discourse analysis, to understand not only how stereotyped gender-dichotomies are maintained and reproduced, but also the ways in which possible alternative gender performances take place. In a previous article I demonstrated that sexual romantic negotiations are a significant part of young Norwegians' text messages as they decide what positions to use and what toys such as this innovative male masturbator and others. In this article I focus on the ways in which young people translate their moods and body-languages into texts, a process connected to the emergence of signs of femininity and masculinity in text message love-projects.[3]

7 After a brief discussion of research methods, I will discuss linguistic dimensions of text messages. Then, after presenting Heidi's and Randi's love-project text messages, I will develop a gender explicit analysis. I have changed the names of those participating in the study.

Research Methods

8 The project on which this article is based was guided by a triangulation of methods: focus groups- and in-depth-interviews, network-maps, drawings, and text and multimedia messages. In this article the analyses are generally supported by all empirical methods, with particular emphasis on interviews and text messages.[4]

9 In 2001, I did group-interviews of nine young white middle class media-students (15 −16 year old girls) in two groups at a technical high school in Oslo, Norway. During a month in fall 2001, the same nine girls forwarded me all their sent and received text messages. When the informant sent or received a text message, she synchronously and manually sent a copy to my mobile telephone. [5] This resulted in about one thousand text messages.

10 During 2004, I re-interviewed six of the same young girls from the 2001-study, as well as recruiting nine new (white, middleclass) informants from Oslo and Bodø. In total my sample included, five males and ten females, all 18-19 years old. Six females of the 2004-sequence participated in a further forward-method round, while three females and one male also sent me a sample of their last month's camera-telephone images, animations and graphics, for a total of 111 MMS.[6]

11 The duration of the forward-method varied for each individual, lasting for periods ranging from three days to a month each interim of empirical study. Even though there was a large range in the number of forwarded text messages, most of them forwarded between fifty to hundred text messages. All text messages were transcribed by hand in 2001, whereas due to newer technology, I was able to "Bluetooth" text- and multimedia messages from my mobile telephone directly to the computer in the latter empirical period.[7] In all interviews I used a tape-recorder to generate transcripts. Each interview lasted sixty to ninety minutes.

Readings of Discourse Analysis

12 There was no automatic operation in the forward-method, which was simply based on each informant's co-operation, willingness and remembering to forward their messages. Therefore, the empirical findings are not to be interpreted as either objective or universal truths. In fact, following arguments put forward by Steinar Kvale (1997; see also Cathrine Egeland, 2001) I suggest that the knowledge that emerges with/in an interview is not seen as an objective knowledge that emerges from the "inside" of the interviewee. Instead, the interview is comprehended as a particular discourse-situation where meanings are negotiated and objects are constituted (Egeland, 2001; Kvale, 1997).

13 Thus, the analysis of gender performances in this paper implies taking into account principles such as heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity that regulate the production of discourses. In this sense, the knowledge derived from an interview is not an objective knowledge about something, rather it is a knowledge of, *with* or *in between* the interviewee and the interviewer; the knowledge is seen as "inter-relational" where negotiations of meanings play a key-role (Kvale, 1997). Being located in a specific time and space, the interview as a discourse-situation is comprehended as a situation in which the interviewee and interviewer are given specific positions in a certain discursive universe where a negotiation of meanings may occur.

14 In order to analyse text messages used by the young women and men engaged in love projects, I find it necessary to first outline and discuss some noteworthy linguistic aspects of text messages. Hence, in the next section I will shed light on several linguistic aspects of text messages adopted by the young text messagers.

Text Message (il)literacy

15 In text message communication, aspects of physical appearance such as attitude, posture, voice, marked articulations, accents, gestures, face expressions etc. are not present. As several works on mobile telephone communication have shown, the absence of the entire physical display of communication results in young people's urge to translate their body language into text messages. [8]

16 In previous work, I have discussed how informants indicate hesitation or pause by using ellipsis (...), how they emphasise the atmosphere or the weightiness of voice by using exclamation marks, and how they indicate their kind feelings as well as minimise confusion and misinterpretation by the very frequent usage of emoticons and asterisks. In my study, the most frequent emoticon is

the 'smiley' ':)', mainly used in text message-closings, whereas the asterisk '' *is often seen marking words such as* Koz* and *Klemz* (both words are stylized spellings of hug). As Ylva Hård af Segerstad (2005) points out in her recent study of text message language in Sweden, the asterisk often serve the same purpose as the emoticons, yet, she argues, by adding an asterisk around a typed version of a word, 'the marked text is marked explicitly as indicating an action…' (af Segerstad 2005: 330). This is illustrated in Tina's text message below:

'Elsker deg også…du får kose deg i helga, da:) *kline og kose med*'

(Love you too…enjoy your weekend:) *making out and hugging*)

17 (From Tina's forwarded text messages in 2001)

The Bizarre Mum

18 Another way of embodying the text is to use capital letters to express a loud shouting voice or anger. However, non-intended usage of capital letters or no use of emoticons or asterisk at all signifies text message illiteracy. According to the young informants, this occurs frequently in text messages from their parents:

19 > My mother thinks she knows how to write messages, but she doesn't use small letters, only capital letters. She doesn't even know how to write a question mark… her messages are just weird. (Interview with Tina, Prøitz, 2003: 49).

20 As friends of the same social circle often have shared background knowledge, text messages do not need to be explicit. As af Segerstad adds, joint references enable them to 'rely on the receiver's ability to make pragmatic inferences when decoding abbreviated messages' (2005: 328). Hence, as Tina's mother lacks this community specific and text message-linguistic knowledge, her text messages are perceived as bizarre and incomplete.

21 Among other informants, whose local dialect is different from the hegemonic Oslo dialect (which is phonetically close to the dominant written standard in Norway), maintaining their phonetic spellings in their text messages may be important in order to emphasise their local identity. According to two informants from the northern part of Norway, text messages written in standard language are perceived as eccentric in a negative sense. They both claim that using standard language in their text messages would create a distance from the other person while sounding very formal and impersonal.

Mimicking Modes of Masculinity

22 Another interesting point is that this community specific language in text messaging can be used in a parodying and ironic sense. One eighteen year old informant, Knut, underlined how he and his friends mimic 'those lameass smileys' and add stylised spellings simply to make a joke or as an ironic comment. I suggest that the mimicking of the internalised, community specific modes may be a rite de passage in getting older as they sought to demonstrate that they "outgrew" this practice through their mockery. Their mockery can also be interpreted as a desire to distinguish themselves from 'mainstream' text messaging practices. In her study of U.K. men's lifestyle magazines, Bethan Benwell (2004) argues that the usage of irony may play a key role in constructing masculinity(-ies) in far more ambiguous, multiple and fluctuating ways, especially when compared with traditional hegemonic masculine performances.

23 The outline above will be the point of departure for the following analysis. Discourses of gender, sexuality, femininity and masculinity in text message communication will be discussed.

Cute Boys and Game Boys

24 In accordance with how one understands oneself, other individuals or one's relationship to others' gender is one of the most significant in terms of social positioning.[9] When I ask my informants what they associate with femininity and masculinity, they tend to be very clear-cut in their characterisations. With the term femininity they associate hearts, flowers, gay men, soft and beautiful movements, emotions, caring, make-up, dresses, whereas masculinity is associated with muscles, groovy cars, hardness, strength, dominance, leadership, straight lines, tightness, roughness – or as André puts it: 'a person in a jacket, with a deep voice and emotionally limited as only a masculine person may be, – that is masculine.' (Interview with André, 2004). André's portrayal of being masculine is consistent with hegemonic bedrock masculinity, defined by R.W. Connell (1995) as:

25 ...the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordinations of women. (R.W. Connell 1995: 77)

26 The gender-polarized configuration is further underscored when I ask the young informants whether they are able to distinguish a text message by gender.[10] According to the majority of the informants' perceptions, girls tend to write longer and more detailed text messages than boys. Again, let us listen to Morten's perception of "gendered" text messages:

MORTEN: Girls have a lot that's different...they have abbreviations, although they put them in a totally different way than boys would have done. Boys just do it straight, as simple as that I think. They don't care to nag people with text messages. They say what they have to say and that's it. Or call me. But girls I think are much more able to explain pretty well what they mean in text messages, straight forward, but quite clear. I think they use more time. I usually receive longer messages from girls.

LIN: Do you write longer replies to girls?

27 MORTEN: It depends. If they start to chat via texts then I prefer them to call me instead if they want to talk. If I chat via texts and send "yes", it costs one krone.[11] So maybe seven "yes" on questions, that's pretty silly. It should be used for what it is meant for, to send messages. (Interview with Morten, 2004)

28 Other informants support this view by saying that most of the strict, short and clear-cut text messages they receive are written by boys or men. Moreover, most of them perceive that young males in general find it harder to write emotional text messages than young females. Anja, one of the 18 year old female informants, shares these opinions, claiming that girls tend to be much freer in their compositions, whereas boys have a much firmer structure:

29 Girls tend to use "z's" and "hugz" and so on in the end. A girl is more slack in their structure whilst boys just tighten up the text as much as they can: "Are you okay? I am. Call me tomorrow" that is the whole message. Whereas girls would write "How are you" and "What have you been doing lately – we must get together soon – do you have a new boyfriend?" A much looser structure, but not always. Boys can also be cute in their texts. (Interview with Anja, 2004).

30 As further noted by af Segerstad, emoticons and asterisks are often used to 'convey meaning in a creative way, save time, space and effort and also to help disambiguate text' (af Segerstad, 2005: 331). Yet, this way of tinting and colouring text messages, is according to the sociologist Rich Ling (2004, 2005) mainly a female practice. In his writings about 'gendering of text messages' in Norway, he emphasises that particularly younger women seem to have a broader emotional register when sending text messages than young males:

31 ...female teens write longer more complex messages. They include aspects of standard written language such as capitalization and punctuation. Moreover, they are more likely to include emotional elements in their communications (such as emoticons and items such as "xxx"), and they are more inclined to include in their SMS messages such refined formalities of traditional written letters such as salutations and closings. (Ling, 2005: 336).

32 Based upon various studies of spoken conversation, Ling states that young women in general seem to have better interaction skills (2004: 164). Other studies (Döring Hellwig and Klimsa, 2004; Hareide, 2002; Lee and Sohn, 2004; Skog, 2002) support this view by claiming that girls tend to be more socially oriented in their mobile phone use, whereas boys emphasise its technological utilities. In addition to research on mobile telephones, various recent network and online studies have shown that participants online interact using the cultural, class, ethnic, gender and sexuality, etc. displays that they already perform in face to face interaction (Bromseth, 2003; Corneliussen, 2003; Nakamura, 2002). Hence, 'doing virtuality' is as Lisa Nakamura (2002: 3) claims, never unmarked.

33 Other researchers have commented on the way in which gender, sexuality and social issues related to magazines are presented to, and adopted by, young people.[12] In Mary Jane Kehily's (1999) discussion of how magazines may influence young people's mediation and negotiation of sexual issues, she suggests that young women are more likely than young men to build up a range of emotional repertoires and vocabulary. She argues that young women learn femininity through continual and collective reading of teenage magazines where social and sexual issues are frequently present. Correspondingly, her study suggests that similar issues addressed in

magazines for young males would appear to 'generate feelings of emasculation and suspicion', here related to gay identity (Kehily, 1999: 71). Here though, Michael Kimmel (1998) and R.W. Connell (1995) argue that "manhood" (here, seen as the traditional "ideal man", men in privileged and dominant positions) is only attainable for a distinct minority, and further stress that several subcategories of masculinity exist side by side. Other researchers (Hanke,1992; Søndergaard, 2000; Tjeder, 2002) point out that the nucleus of the hegemonic masculine role is still ultimately located within compulsory *heterosexuality*.

Risky Masculinity

34 Among the informants, similar understandings about "proper" femininity and masculinity to those stated above seem to be relevant to text message communication between young males. According to Jorun and Maja, both 18, males who are too emotionally articulate would probably lend support to gay associations:

> LIN: Do you think that text message communication, where the physical body is absent, may enable males to do more femininity? I mean, can two men or boys write hugs to each other without meeting resistance?
>
> MAJA: I think it will be noticed.
>
> JORUN: If a boy writes to another boy "You look nice today" and adds a smiley with a blinking eye, and they're just kidding...and let's say they dislike gay people, I think it will be much more accepted because they *are* just kidding.
>
> LIN: But girls, can they add more smileys to each other without being questioned about whether they are flirting with each other or not?
>
> MAJA: Yes.
>
> JORUN: Sure.
>
> MAJA: I think the norms give us a broader right to comment on... for example clothes. If I like Lisa's pants, I may say so in my text message to her, "Where did you buy them" and so on. No one would ever see that as something unusual...
>
> LIN: And if a boy had written to his male friend "You've got on nice pants, today!"?
>
> 35 MAJA: Well, it depends on how close friends they are, and there *are* definitely differences among boys, and there is not an unambiguous answer to this, but I think at least some would have wondered about...in a way... are you gay? (Interview with Jorun and Maja, 2004)

36 According to Maja, the small gesture of paying another male compliment about his appearance would be noticed as a counter-traditional practice among men. Hence, the practice is not only made visible, but it also becomes risky. Interestingly, as unquestioningly stated by Jorun and Maja, this riskiness does not seem to concern the females. Are the framings different for female same-gender communication? As Willy Pedersen and Hans Kristiansen (2003) claim in a quantitative study of young Norwegians commencing sexual intercourse, young females seem to have more freedom than young males in 'doing' various sexual practices. They argue that this is partly because homoerotic activities and interests are more interwoven in female heterosexual practices. For males, homosexuality seems to be more threatening and in a potential conflict with the traditional male gender-role. Pedersen and Kristiansen suggest that female gender-roles are less attached to taboos and stereotyped expectations.

37 Hence, the question remains as to whether it is in fact possible, as claimed by Anja in the previous section, for boys to "be cute" in their text messages? Although numerous studies seem to maintain and reproduce polarized and hegemonic gender dichotomies, in the following analysis of Heidi's and Randi's text messages I will search for a more multifaceted image.

Embodying Gender in Love-Projects

38 The text messages below are excerpts from two different text message-love projects forwarded by Heidi (text messages a-g) and Randi (text messages h-o). In both cases, text messages formed part of the initiation of love-projects that emerged in May 2004.[13]

39 The first time I met the girls, in 2001, they were fifteen years old classmates. Heidi was in the middle of a very appealing love-project with Håvard, whereas Randi's text messages were mainly coordination of sport-activities and parties with her female peers. In Heidi's case, the drama and intensity of her love-project escalated as performances of gender, sexuality and power relations

continuously shifted. The analysis of Heidi's text messages in 2001 showed that Heidi and Håvard performed versions of gender(s) and sexuality(ies) not commonly associated with their physical sex (like Heidi performed in more masculine ways and vice versa) while they also seemed to challenge each other's gender positions. However, as the power struggle proceeded, what I found most intriguing was the emergence of a distinct feature in the love-project; namely, a game played through text message-technology (Prøitz, 2003).

Heidi and Randi are now 18 years old, and they are both in the middle of new love-projects. After presenting excerpts of Heidi's and Randi's text message conversations, a gender-explicit analysis will follow.

Heidi's love-project

When Heidi resumed forwarding text messages in May 2004, she was currently in a relationship with Henrik.[14] However, shortly after she started to forward text messages, she entered a new love-project with another young male, concurrent to juggling her relationship with Henrik. Heidi starts the conversation by expressing how much she misses the text message partner:

a) Jeg dævver..Seriøst. Hadde gitt mye for å ha deg her nå. Vi må møtes snart igjen, ok? Savner deg allerede! :) Klem (21:41)

(I am dying..Seriously. Would have given a lot just to be with you now. We must meet very soon, ok? Miss you already! :) Hugs)

Her text message-partner replies five minutes later by reconfirming the mutual affection. Simultaneously he points out one of the love-project's obstacles:

b) Er litt rart.. Savner deg og..mye! Vil gjerne møte deg igjen;) men helst når du er singel..;) (21:46)

(A bit strange.. Miss you too..a lot! Want to meet you again;) but would prefer to do so when you are single..;)

Almost a quarter of an hour later (with no reply from Heidi in between), the text message-partner continues by stating the second obstacle:

c) Klarer ikke slutte å tenke på deg..hvorfor må du bo i oslo? (22:28)

(Can't stop thinking about you..why do you have to live in oslo?)

In the next two text messages, I have not been able to locate who the sender is. However, affirmation continues to be the main theme in both of them, yet even more passionate and intense:

d) Går rundt og lurer på hva som feiler meg..er sykt..har møtt deg 3 ganger, men har aldrig følt noe liknende før..vil så gjerne holde deg..kysse deg..blir gal! (22:41)

(Walking around and wondering what's wrong with me..it's insane..have met you 3 times, but have never felt anything like this before..want so much to hold you..kiss you..going crazy!)

e) J vet, føler d same..J tror det er fordi vi er ganske like. Vi passer liksom sammen. Hver gang vi møtes klikker d bare. Og d r en SKAM at vi ikke er sammen.. (22:46)

(I know, I feel exactly the same way..I think it's because we are very much alike. We sort of fit together. Each time we meet it just clicks. And it's a SHAME that we're not together..)

Again Heidi's text message-partner is seen pointing out the obstacles, however now with a request to solve them:

f) Du kommer i sommer sant? Kan du ikke være singel da? Vet jeg spør om mye men hadde vært digg.. (03:03 am)

(You will come this summer, right? Can't you be single by then? I know I'm requesting a lot but would have been cool..)

Their text message-conversation ends in the middle of the night, after five and a half hour, with Heidi replying in a vague, yet affirming way:

g) Jeg kommer i sommer. Helt sikkert. Om jeg er singel da får tiden vise, men jeg må nesten si jeg håper.. Du er bare så søt du:) (03:06 am)

(I'll promise to visit in the summer. Definitely. If I am single by then, time will tell, however I must say that I almost hope so... You are just so cute :))

Randi's love-project

By the time Randi resumed forwarding text messages, she is in the middle of her 'russefeiring', which is indicated in her text messages[15] She has just ended her relationship with her boyfriend and has recently met a new potential love-project partner. The first text message refers to an embarrassing incident:

h) Hei.. :) håper ikke du syns ting var rart i dag, etter helgen.. :)

(00:52)

(Hi.. :) hope you don't think things are weird today after this weekend.. :))

After confirming that everything is fine, a suggestion is posed:

i) absoulutt ikke.. sorry for überkjip kveld as. En annen ting, si fra neste gang du er edru, for jeg har gjerne lyst til å være det en dag. er litt lei fyll..

(00:55)

(definitely not.. sorry for über-dull night, though. Another thing, tell me next time you are sober, I really want to be sober one day, a bit tired of drinking..)

In the next text, the amorous announcement is stated, carefully but clear:

j) btw, en annen ting som jeg tror er litt farlig er at jeg tror jeg begynner å bli litt forelsket i deg..

(00:55)

(btw, another thing that I may find a bit scary is that I think I am falling in love with you..)

The receiver seems obviously flattered as she/he goes on with a rather unstructured (yet conscious?) reply:

k) :) nå ble jeg flau.. :) litt teit kanskje men.. Jeg vet ikke helt hva jeg skal si jeg, men jeg tror ikke det er så veldig farlig.. Hvorfor skulle det egentlig være det? :) jeg er edru hver dag jeg, så det skal ikke bli noe problem.. :) hyggelig med kjip kveld, vi fikk jo tatt noen knuter!

(01:00)

(:)now you've made me embarrassed.. :) a bit silly maybe but.. I don't know what to say, but I don't think it's that scary.. Why should it really be scary?:) I am sober every day, so that's no problem.. :) nice with a boring night after all, we managed to catch some knots! [16])

Yet another affirming text, followed by a portrayal of an(other?) embarrassing incident:

l) ja! morsomt det ihvertfall! er alltid gøy å være sammen med deg anyways. hvis du blir flau nå så skulle du visst hvor flau jeg var når jeg ga deg et Ganske stort kyss når du var edru foran eks kjæresten din, tihi.

(01:04)

(yes! At least that was fun! is always fun to hang out with you anyway. if you became embarrassed now, you should have known how embarrassed I got when I gave you a pretty huge kiss when you were sober, standing right in front of your ex-boyfriend, tihi.)

Randi excuses the text message partner's responsibility for the incident, before underlining that her relationship with her ex-boyfriend now belongs to the past:

m) Det kunne jo ikke du vite.. :) han ble jo ikke super fornøyd, men er jo ikke eksen for ingenting.. :)

(01:07)

(You couldn't know that.. :) he wasn't very happy, but isn't my x for nothing.. :))

The conversation ends with two affirming text message-closings:

n) kjipern det as, uansett så er jeg glad i deg randi, sov godt, puss

(01:09)!

(that's lame, but I am really fond of you, Randi, sleep tight, kiss)

o) Jeg er glad i deg og kjekken! God natt :)

(01:09)

(I am fond of you too, you hunk! Sleep tight:))

Instant, Immediate Intimacy

According to Anne Krogstad (1999), there is a range of possible interpretations in all kinds of communication. To mention just a few of these interpretations, communication may be (mis)leading, betraying, clarifying, confusing or seductive. However, as Krogstad (1999) further notes, what one expresses contributes to the definition and constitution of reality(ies). In Heidi's and Randi's text message-realities above, a continuation of initial intimate and romantic love-projects seems to take place. In Heidi's case, she begins the conversation with an amorous and affirming text message. During the next five and a half hours – and six text messages later – the young couple repeat and re-confirm their love-project in various amorous ways through text messaging. However, to send seven text messages during five and a half hours within an emerging love-project like Heidi's is, according to my informants, unusually few text messages. At this crucial point of the love-project, a couple of minutes would be the most common, expected and *accepted* text message-transfer time – or as the nineteen years informant Kristian says: 'you most likely sit and count the seconds'. Hence, if they exceed this time, most of the informants say they try to make up a reasonable explanation for themselves in order to reduce their rising anxiety. The significance of keeping to the accepted time seems to be particularly important in the early phase of a love-project. The vulnerability one experiences while anticipating a new text message is expressed by Jorun and Maja in this way:

> MAJA: If it takes fifteen minutes, I actually think, oh my God, now she thinks I am stupid, that's why she doesn't want to answer me…fifteen minutes is far too long. One needs confirmation for one-self I think… One tends to be quite nervous, so one paces about with impatience and continuously checks the phone…is it going to beep soon?
>
> JORUN: Yes, I used to cheer my self up with…well, she is probably having a nap, or a shower, or she eats dinner… you know, its most likely a reasonable explanation, right?
>
> LIN: So what did you fear?
>
> MAJA: That it [the relationship] would end, I think…that it wouldn't turn out to be anything more serious.
>
> JORUN: One is of course very anxious of being let down… so a couple of minutes…
>
> MAJA: So you receive the message, write and send it back. It doesn't take long. (Interview with Jorun and Maja, 2004)

Thus, according to the informants, the text message frequency in Heidi's conversation is perceived as not only unacceptable, but most likely would also play up anxiety. In Randi's case, the eight text messages and seventeen minutes sequence is far more consistent with the internalised customs as pointed out above. Here, the conversation opens with a vague expression (h and i), before carefully, yet directly revealing an initial love (j). Although the following texts in Randi's case refer to an embarrassing incident, they also function to clarify and confirm the young text message-partner's mutual fascination for each other.[17]

Emoticons and signs such as smileys, final points, question and exclamation marks are frequently used in various and distinctive ways in all text messages. According to my informants, a final double dot is used to initiate pauses and hesitations, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, it is also used to soften a text in order to make it more friendly. The usage of final double dots at the end of a sentence may imply that a reply is expected or wanted. The question mark also serves this purpose, in its traditional usage. Jorun describes the custom as follows:

> It means…I don't know why, but it looks a bit weird if we just put it to an end just like that. It may also look like you want to say something more. It is nothing final. You sort of opens up a lot… you are to wonder a bit. (Interview with Jorun, 2004).

The significance of a question mark is further emphasised by Kristian underneath:

> It is smart to put the question at the end of the message. If it's a part of a long message, its easy to forget it if it's in the beginning. And what one reads in the end is always what one remembers. And when there's a question mark there, one usually remembers that 'wasn't it something I should have

remembered?' So it's not only posed a question, but you should also reply as well. (Interview with Kristian, 2004)

76 In line with Jorun's and Krisitan's statements above, the initial intimate and romantic love-projects in Heidi's and Randi's text messages seem to be "translated" and underlined by the usage of emoticons and non-alphanumeric signs.

Composing the Perfect Sentence

77 Interestingly, according to Ling's (2005: 342) recent linguistic study of text messages in Norway, the average message uses only about 20% of a message's available space. The same tendencies are seen in af Segerstad's (2005: 322) study, which found the mean length of messages to be no more than 64 characters. Being considerably below the upper limit of 160 characters, af Segerstad suggests that long text messages seem to be too time-consuming and non-effective (ibid).

78 However, when counting the characters (including the spaces) used in the love-projects above, the average in Heidi's and Randi's fifteen text messages is 130 characters, far beyond both Ling and af Segerstads findings. In Heidi's case, the peak messages were kept just below the 160 character limit (d and e both 157 characters/spaces long, made possible due to frequent abbreviations) whereas Randi's forwarded peak messages both exceeded the limit (289 and 213). In the latter case, the messages have been sent in two separate parts, which is not only time-consuming, but also costs twice as much.

79 To re-write and to re-compose a text in order to fit the 160 character limit, or to write a 289 characters long text, is time-consuming. Consequently, in both cases, the young people must have spent time and effort and be willing to pay double (k and l). As a number of informants state, text message expenses do not have first priority when an emerging sexual romantic negotiation is at stake:

80 I never sent just one message. It was at least two, sometimes three and four parts. So, I burnt off money on text messages, but I couldn't care less. (Interview with Lasse, 2004)

81 I thought it was so nice, exciting and fun to write text messages, money or not. I bought new cards all the time. I didn't notice it at all (laughs) it didn't matter at all. (Interview with Jorun, 2004)

82 The importance of a well-composed text message, is further underlined by the eighteen year old informant André in his preparation for his next love-project approach:

83 I am going to…I am going to write it [the text message] down on a paper in order to make it sound nice … I have to find the…the perfect sentence. (Interview with André, 2004)

84 As seen here the immediacy and effectiveness of text message-communication are replaced by more time-consuming, but well-modelled sentences. In both Heidi's and Randi's text messages, embodying the texts by using emoticons, signs and non-alphanumeric symbols in order to textualise intimacy and affection seemed to be a significant practice. Hence, I argue that text messages in love-projects are a part of an intimate discourse where the social and romantic negotiations are more important than time and expenses (Prøitz, 2005).

DIY-Masculinities [18]

85 However, what I found most interesting is that distinguishing whether a text message has been written by a female or a male sometimes turns out to be quite difficult, sometimes even impossible. In Heidi's case, I was able to locate the sender of a, b, c, f and g, due to the additional information from the network-map where Heidi had checked out her most frequent text message-partners, interviews and text messages forwarded before and after the excerpts displayed here; these sometimes used names or other gender-specific indications.

86 As for Randi, only m, n, and o, include gender-specific terms: using 'he' about the ex-partner (m), indicating that Randi most likely had a heterosexual relationship, the usage of Randi's name (n), as well as the usage of the term 'kjekken' which is most used when paying boys/men compliments (o). Interestingly, by just looking at the way the young text message-couples embody their texts, I argue that locating the female and the male is impossible. As for Heidi's climax-text messages (d, e), as well as five of Randi's texts, distinguishing the females' texts from the males' texts has not been possible even with the additional information.

87 How can this occur when the young people themselves claim that there are obvious differences between text messages sent by males and those sent by females? As stated by the informants, in

addition to various researchers' comments on gender, sexuality and media, Heidi's and Randi's male text messaging-partners should both have been brief in using terms of familiarity and in expressing emotions and intimacy. The denial and effacement of such knowledge and skills would be necessary in order to maintain a particular account of masculinity, or as Søndergaard (2000) notes, as to be successfully integrated as a culturally recognisable male.

88 On the basis of the informants' own description of femininity and masculinity, the text message-excerpts seem to be very *feminine*: long, detailed, very emotionally loaded with a lot of emoticons, non-alphanumeric symbols and signs. One possibility is that in having sexual romantic negotiations, ideas of love and intimacy may be enfolded in more implicit feminising (and infantilising) terms. In this manner, the heterosexual context makes feminised intimacy less threatening to masculinity as the feminised intimacy gestures signal sexual intent. However, as expressed by some of the male informants, detailed and emotional text messages also occur between young male friends where the sexual intent is not a key issue. The male intimacy is portrayed in the interview excerpt below, where 18 year old Knut describes recently received text messages from his male friends:

> KNUT: He [Erik] writes for example "Dear friend, sometimes, when I work a lot, or when I'm facing emotional challenges, I tend to feel vulnerable, yet happy. I'm not good at showing it, just want to be strong and independent. However, in moments like this, I feel particularly grateful to have best friends that it's nice to meet… good to lean against one another. Hugs, Erik :)", so it goes like this.
>
> LIN: And this…is this a joke?
>
> KNUT: No, it's not a joke. It's real.
>
> LIN: How do you know when it's a joke and when it's real?
>
> KNUT: Because he is…that's the way he is. He doesn't send ironic text messages. But Siri (Knut's girlfriend) could have done so, or Markus…and even though it has smileys and stuff like that, I can tell that it's not a joke.
>
> LIN: And André (the classmate), could he write like that, like Erik, or do you two have a totally different mode?
>
> KNUT: André perhaps writes more like…he can write "I am fond of you" and stuff like that, and "hugs" and…being serious about it. Or he can be more like, "you're a cool buddy", a bit more like that, or it could be "now I'm in the john taking a dump"
>
> 89 So in a way it's everything. (Interview with Knut, 2004)

90 As with Knut's comments above, I suggest that the key issue is not about being in a 'safe' heterosexual context. Instead I argue that young males seem to, as Benwell (2003: 8) notes, 'embrace the notion of gender inconsistency and evasiveness with less anxiety about its possible "effects". So boys can also write cute texts?

91 In the final section, I seek to understand the maintenance and reproduction of gender polarised perceptions as well as examining the key effects of counter masculine narratives and practices.

The Soft Boiled Dick Masculinity [19]

92 As there seems to be a clear discrepancy between the informants' perceptions of masculinity and the way they actually practise/perform how to be a young man, I argue that noticeable alternative practices with/in socially accepted gender configurations are emerging. When listening to what the informants associated with masculinity, it seems as though these young people lack positive, affirming and beneficial words when portraying a young male. As pointed out earlier, the young people seem to have certain perceptions of how to act in order to be (or to be perceived) a recognisable and acceptable male. Nevertheless, as seen in the love-project text messages, there are little if no differences in the way they 'do' gender. Hence, I will argue that although the discourse of gender as the two-sex model is well established 'within' the young peoples' consciousnesses, gender may appear in practice in far more inconsistent, ambivalent and ambiguous ways.

93 When further listening to Knut's outline of masculinity, the 'Connellian' configuration of gender practice is characterised in a considerably ambivalent way:

> KNUT: Well, a lot of people associate a leader, one who is in charge, one who speaks out in public… more or less, more physical matters, one who plays soccer, goes to the gym- lifts weights, with being

a man and with what it is to be masculine. And if a woman or a girl takes on the role of being the most noisiest one in the classroom in combination with playing soccer during recess or uses snus [20] , then you sort of…because I think there are certain premises that are needed to be…or to become a man…First of all you must sort of…well you don't have to look like a man, but it helps a bit if you do look like a man. If you have beard…but there are two different levels, either you look like a man or you behave like a man. Or you can do both. So if you behave like a man…I'm thinking that you are in a way sort of patriarchal…you sort of want to be in charge….But I mean, it is a very constructed situation, or at least…I mean, it sounds a bit old-fashioned, but in a way there is a big change in relation to what is masculine and what is feminine. At least, it is pretty individual…it is much more like you're cool because of what you *mean* and *not* because you are a man. … However, my status as a man drops each time I go and hug André [male class-mate].

LIN: Are you sure about that?

94 KNUT: Well, at the same time I feel that it is reinforced, because I feel confident… …it's twofold because I really want to give him a big hug…and maybe I want it even more as I know …that there are lots of people who think it's really silly that I give André a hug. And maybe because of that it's a relief to know that I can do just that, give him a hug. (Interview with Knut, 2004)

95 According to Lindsay Fitzclarence's and Christopher Hickey's (2001) study of masculinity in a sports-context, young males' status in culturally dominant games such as football/ soccer is to a large extent seen as a test of masculinity. Hence, handling physical pressure is not only a test of character, but also serves to give the boy approval and acceptance. The link between physical activity and 'being a man' is pointed out in Knut's account above. With his example of the noisy, soccer-playing girl with 'snus' under her lip, he not only exemplifies a subversive femininity, but also sheds light on the strong hegemonic gender discourses.

96 In the social and cultural structures that the young Norwegians in my study are a part of, the heteronormative culture is the "governing" culture. This is expressed by various rules and customs as well as social rituals built around the two-sex model. The heteronormative regulation which makes heterosexuality not only expected and dominant, but also perceived as normal and right, is described by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (2002) as signifying:

97 …the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged. … It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations – often unconscious, immanent to practice or institutions. (Berlant and Warner, 2002: 309)

98 As emphasised here, these regulative practices are often "invisible" and yet maintained by the immanent mechanisms of "correct" cultural knowledge – such as André's portrayal of the emotional limited masculine, Maja and Jorun's connotations of the 'gay' text message, or Knut's example of the dominant, soccer-playing male. With the continuous repeating and citing of culturally acceptable and recognisable performances as male or female, the philosopher Judith Butler argues that an *illusion* of gender as something substantial becomes fixed and "naturalised" (1990, 1993). In principle, she further claims, men and women may perform femininity and masculinity regardless of their physical sex as one does not have gender but one *does* gender (1990, 1993).

99 The 'Butlerian' "doing-gender" perspective is gradually outlined by Knut, as he concludes 'that you are cool because of what you mean, and not because you are a man'. Nevertheless, the ambivalence and contradictions between the hegemonic discourses and the counter-traditional masculinity performance becomes apparent in Knut's story of hugging his male classmate. This is noteworthy because, although their practice faces social sanctioning, Knut and his friend seem unconcerned about the possible effects of these practices. I suggest that the active production of these types of subversive masculine narratives contributes to providing young males with more socially responsible and alternative versions of affirmative masculinities.

Concluding Comments

100 Although the 'F.T.M.A.K.E.S.I.O.T' ('The Association of Opposing Women's Endless Gossip on Public Telephones') was organised more than seventy-five years ago, the maintenance and idealisation of a conservative picture of femininity and masculinity continues to be reproduced. By continuously demonstrating a heterosexual masculine ideal – as referred to in various studies in this article,

accompanied by the young informants' perceptions, one, as Mia Consalvo (2003: 30) emphasises, simultaneously denies other forms of gender and sexual performance and maintains the dominant version of masculinity (Consalvo 2003: 30). In this article, a more multifaceted image has been found.

101 By looking at young informants' text messages in sexual romantic negotiations, I have found that the text messages have all seemed to be very long, emotional and detailed regardless of the sender's physical gender. With regard to the young males in this study, this is seen as quite inconsistent and ambiguous in relation to traditional masculine performances. One explanation of this discrepancy could be to understand text messages in love-projects as a cultural product or discourse that disrupts traditional gender -and sexuality-differentiated displays and practices. However, due to the recurrent contradictions in this analysis, I agree with Kehily's (1999) suggestion that a gender and sexuality-ideal may exist *parallel* to young people's display of non-traditional gender -and sexuality practices. Hence, love projects in text messages seem to offer a site where young men may simultaneously disrupt and fracture traditional gender and sexuality-performances, while also recomposing and maintaining the bedrock norms.

Author's Biography

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Notes

[1] The citation describes how the launch of the telephone at the world-exhibition in Philidelphia 1876 was announced, by professor T. Sterry, the head of the jury, in a letter to the invention's father, A.G. Bell (in Due, 2003 [Kingsbury, 1915: 32])

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[2] This indicates that the new, correct telephone etiquette was geared toward men as it apparently didn't "take" for women.

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[3] The term 'sexual romantic negotiation' suggests performances (here: text messages) where flirtation/ affection/ romantic/ erotic or sexual intimacy or desire are acted out or negotiated (Prøitz, 2003). Moreover, I find the term 'love-project' valuable as it emphasises the constructed aspects of sexual romantic negotiations. Hence my usage of the term is built upon Heidi Eng's (2003) work, indicating an understanding of sex, gender and sexuality as acts, expressions, communication or language. The term is also fruitful as it ties this article's questions and theoretical perspectives in a productive way.

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[4] The network-map was designed as a target where the interviewee checked out the frequency of her/his text message-partners. The closer to the centre, the more frequent were the communications. The interviewee was also asked to draw a sketch of an individual customised mobile telephone, totally uninhibited by technological limitations.

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[5] This is possible by choosing the 'reply to multiple' soft-ware-option that is now integrated in today's mobile telephones. In the rest of the article, I will refer to this method by the term 'the forward-method'.

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[6] The number of informants who agreed to join the forward-method was fewer in the second round. I suggest the drop of participants occurred due to the fall of newsworthiness in being a part of the study. Growing older may also generate a need to protect one's privacy in a different way.

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[7] Bluetooth is a radio-wave-technology. This technology is 'rich' and fast as the sender and the receiver do not need to be visible to each other, which is required in an infrared transfer.

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[8] Döring, Hellwig and Klimsa, 2004, Hareide 2002, Johnsen 2000, Lee and Sohn, 2004, Ling 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004, Nordahl 2000, Prøitz 2003, 2005, Rheingold 2003, af Segerstad, 2005, Skog 2000, 2002

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[9] One suggestion is that this occurs particularly in heterosexual love-projects. Nevertheless, I would argue that cultural and social hegemonic norms are a dominant part of peoples' lives, regardless of their sexual orientation.

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[10] The most frequent custom is to store each other's names in the mobile phone address book. Hence, each time one of your friends in your address book sends you a text message, you would be able to see who it is – which also reveals the gender. However, here I am more interested in whether they manage to distinguish their text messages by looking at the structure and composition of the text.

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[11] Krone is the Norwegian currency. 1USD≈ 6,3 NOK (February 2005).

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[12] As yet there is only a very small amount of research done on mobile phone/gender and sexuality. I find it necessary and vital to link my study up with other related media analysis.

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[13] As male signatures are used in Heidi's and Randi's previous and later text message conversations, I choose to analyse the text messages according to a male performance. In spite of this, Heidi's and Randi's text message partners could be a physical female and not a physical male.

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[14] As I don't find any text message-communication with Håvard, I assume that their relationship is over.

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[15] In Norway, russefeiring is a term used when graduating students celebrate the end of high school. Although this is not a compulsory practice, most of the graduating students choose to do so. The russefeiring lasts for 14 days in May, ending on the Norwegian national day, May 17th. The russ (i.e. the students participating in the celebration) are easy to distinguish as they are often gathered in large groups, wearing russe-suits and hats – in which the colours on the suit mark their studies. Red and blue russ are the most common. The knots and items one has in the string in the russe-hat illustrates the russe-dare you have passed. The russ are often criticised for their wild ongoing parties, running around raving drunk.

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[16] To 'catch some knots' – or 'collect' knots – is a part of a ritual during the russefeiring in Norway. Each knot symbolises a dare you have accomplished.

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[17] However, though the text message-frequency varied, there were clear similarities in the dramaturgic curve: beginning with a brief, yet straight forward hinting at the last meeting, before initiating a follow-up (a, b, c and h, i), followed by two long text messages in which seem to be the conversations climax (d, e and k, l), before gradually closing by shorter affirming text messages (f, g and m, n, o). Interestingly, the dramatic curve of the conversations is quite similar to the structure of the classical dramatic structure of movies and theatre-plays. I suggest this contributes to underline the excitement of the sexual romantic negotiations, however far more detailed work is needed.

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[18] The abriviation 'DIY' means 'do it yourself' and is often used in advice manuals. Here I have borrowed the 'term' from David Tjeder's article about the American ideal of the self-made man in a Swedish context from 1850-1900. (Tjeder, 2002: 74)

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[19] The term 'the soft-boiled-dick' masculinity connotes, according to Judith Kegan Gardiner (F. Pfeil's term outlined in Gardiner, 2000:, 259, [1995:105]) both sensitivity and the ultimate resort to violence in contemporary movies, rock music, detective fiction.

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[20] Snus is a tobacco that you put under your upper lip and is frequently used instead of or in addition to smoking cigarettes in Norway and Sweeden. Snus is legal and can be bought in most grocery stores in the two countries. Until the Norwegian 'no-smoking inside public areas'-restriction was implemented in 2004, snus was in general associated with masculinity. Hence, as Knut points out, being a female and using snus is, among many, seen as "un-feminine".

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