

BoyTalk:

A Dialogistic and Critical Theory Analysis of its Potential Impact and Structure

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Sturla Tyr Richardson Moltzau
Student number: 20220928

Aalborg Universitet
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Supervisor: Sarah Awad



Abstract

This paper is an exploratory study on the need for a gender-matching and dyadic online-counselling services for males, e.g., BoyTalk, especially with the consideration that GirlTalk already exists. It is grounded in an interpretivist theory of science, emphasizing the co-construction of meaning and the Self within dialogical contexts that are enveloped by culture through cultural narratives and norms. Drawing from dialogistic theoretical frameworks such as Dialogical Theory of Selfhood and Culturally Inclusive Action Theory for understanding the Self and identity. It also reflects the critical theoretical tradition, particularly the work of Simone de Beauvoir, with the aim to examine how the normative gender dichotomy of masculinity/femininity has a dynamic that traditionally placed males within an oppressor role, which has now become a cage that constricts male's ability to identify with the positive gender norms that are contained within femininity, particularly help-seeking and emotional vulnerability. The methodology is therefore informed by both constructivist and critical epistemologies, and not an objectivist biological perspective. The paper also explores how the current basic methods that GirlTalk currently employs for how to conduct the conversations on the platform can be modelled within the dialogistic frameworks that is employed within the paper, and how they be applicable for BoyTalk as well. These methods are the Socratic method, radical acceptance and positive regard, and the use of mentalizing activities.

The specific issues of interest were bullying, finding a partner, small penis anxiety and micropenises, consent, academic attainment, loneliness, suicide, well-being, and neurodivergence. Furthermore, the paper also sought to establish how the approach GirlTalk uses might be applied to those issues with the dialogistic framework in mind. Finally, it sought to explore how the BoyTalk's presence, image, and its marketing might affect the wider culture, how one could employ the dialogistic framework to best organize BoyTalk to allow for it to flexibly and dynamically face barriers, as well as some structural realities one might have to consider when establishing it. Based on the results found in this paper, it seems likely that there is a need for such a service and that it could provide a positive impact for the individual users, and a larger positive cultural and scientific impact both nationally and internationally.

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BoyTalk: Is There a Need and What is its Purpose?

There are many ways in which girls and women face unique challenges in society. There are certain sex- and gender-based experiences which most people of that group can identify with. Evidence suggests that women understand what other women think and feel better than men do, and vice versa for men (Wacker et al., 2017). Feeling understood by others is an incredibly important experience and daily social experiences of feeling understood has an effect on a person's well-being (Lun et al., 2008). This is one of the key arguments for why there was a need for a gender-matching generalized counselling chat-service for women according to GirlTalk. Another important argument is that women have unique difficulties with mental health, as mirrored in the 'values' section on GirlTalk's website:

INGEN PIGER SKAL MISTRIVES

I GirlTalk arbejder vi for at forebygge mistrivsel blandt piger og unge kvinder, styrke deres selvværd og hjælpe dem, der har det svært.

Siden vores stiftelse i 2004 har vi haft tusindvis af samtaler med piger, der ikke tør dele deres tanker, og oplevelser med andre. Vi har en indsigt i piger og unge kvinders problemer: Vi ved, at alt for mange kæmper og føler sig forkerte, og vi ved, at alt for mange ikke kan leve op til alle de forventninger de selv og andre har til dem. Vi står med en generation af piger, der stræber efter at være perfekte udadtil og som føler sig alene med alt det, der er svært.

- 34,4 procent af de 16 til 24-årige kvinder har et dårligt mentalt helbred.
- 52,3 procent har et højt stress-niveau.
- 21,2 procent af kvinder mellem 15 og 24 år føler, at de har svært ved at leve op til andres forestilling om "en rigtig pige".

Source: <https://www.girltalk.dk/om/om-os/vaerdier/>

The question at hand is whether there is a need for a BoyTalk and how one would establish it. The author has previously conducted a literature review at the request of GirlTalk that uncovered that there were no studies on the topic of gender-matching general therapeutic counselling chat-services such as GirlTalk or BoyTalk (Moltzau, 2023). However, through the literature review, it was uncovered that males consistently had issues with help-seeking behaviour, that there was a significant portion of people from both genders that desired gender-matching in therapeutic services, that people held a preference for the gender of their therapist even in services with less gender expression information available like in phone-therapy, that gender-matching could improve treatment retention in therapy, and that users of online-counselling services presented much higher levels of distress when compared to face-to-face services. These findings indicated that it would be beneficial to further examine the topic of whether there was a need for a service such as BoyTalk.

In the absence of studies that spoke to the specific case of BoyTalk to rely upon, the goal changed to examine more exhaustively whether there is a need for BoyTalk based upon the occurrence of gender specific difficulties for males and what factors may be important to keep in mind if one was to establish BoyTalk. The term male and female will be used when referring to all age groups, boy/girl will be used for children and teenagers (ages 0-17), and men/women will be used for adults. The author acknowledges that the terms male and female may be loaded terms that are often used in more “objective” biological contexts and may give rise to thoughts about the eternal debate of nature vs. nurture within psychology. However, this paper is grounded in an interpretivist theory of science, emphasizing the co-construction of meaning and the Self within dialogical contexts that are enveloped by culture through cultural narratives and norms. Drawing from dialogism, dialogistic theoretical frameworks for understanding the Self and identity, and feminist philosophy, particularly the work of Simone de Beauvoir, it also reflects the critical theoretical tradition, aiming to examine the harmful effects of normative gender dichotomies for males. The methodology is therefore informed by both constructivist and critical epistemologies, and not an objectivist biological perspective.

First, the text will present the theoretical framework which will be employed in later sections in an attempt to elucidate the idiosyncratic cultural difficulties facing males in the present-day culture. Afterwards, the paper will examine a few material differences such as academic attainment, neurodivergence, loneliness, suicide and subjective experience of well-being that do not fit as neatly within the masculine/feminine dichotomy. Finally, the paper will seek to elucidate some topics of relevance when establishing BoyTalk. While this list of topics is not extensive, it should provide some basis for what topics might be important for males to talk about. Additionally, it should be noted that these differences are not divorced from the cultural context and are likely cultural in origin or exacerbated by culture. Finally, the text will attempt to outline how this information is relevant for a potential implementation of BoyTalk with a focus on its cultural impact, the structural realities, the marketing, and areas that need further research. Some of the specific recommendations and points are centred around current policies and processes at GirlTalk as it was written with its presence in mind and therefore might not be applicable to all other similar cases. In most of these sections, the concepts of Culturally Inclusive Action Theory (CIAT), Dialogical Theory of Selfhood (DTS), or Dialectics will be employed to conduct the cultural analysis.

The Structure of GirlTalk

GirlTalk is an organization that provides a range of different gender-matching services that caters to females. The one that sees the most consistent flow of users is the anonymous generalized therapeutic chat-service that caters to females in the age group of 12-24 (though older people can and do write in, though they aren't explicitly advertised to). The userbase mainly consisted of one-time users or people who wrote in a few times, however, some users would return regularly to the service, which was a dynamic that was supported in other chat-services by the findings of the literature review conducted by the author previously (Moltzau, 2023). This seems to indicate that it is a fairly consistent dynamic that spans across a range of different services. The returning users would internally be termed "faithful girls". Even though the service is anonymous, the users are asked if they would like to provide a nickname and their age when writing in. Additionally, GirlTalk is able to track the I.P address of the users, however, this information was only available to the administration so that they could contact relevant authorities if the need arises. Through this information, the administration was also able to track frequent users so that they could conduct psychological evaluations if they deemed them to be especially in need of a more focused and goal-directed approach. The counsellors were unpaid volunteers who received a three-day course on what methods to use when conducting the conversations as well as a digital course to follow. They also receive the opportunity for additional education through different courses intermittently when GirlTalk brought in external experts or experienced the need for further education on specific topics.

The basic methods that GirlTalk teaches its counsellors is the Socratic method, radical acceptance and positive regard, and the use of mentalizing activities. The Socratic method entails raising questions to the user about their current situation and their thoughts surrounding it so that they may gain realizations about it on their own without having the counsellor trying to force their perspectives and value judgements on the user's situation or how they should act. As will be elaborated upon later within the section on CIAT, this could perhaps also be argued to be a form of reflective activity which engages the user in higher level actions (Eckensberger, 2012). The method of radical acceptance is employed to instil the users with a feeling of acceptance so that they feel safe to talk about personal details as well as giving them a feeling of being understood and heard. Finally, mentalizing activities are employed to promote the user to see things from another person of interest's perspective so that they may understand the intentions of others better and to uncover their own negative self-perceptions through the perceptions they believe others to hold about them. Again, as will

be elaborated on later, this method also makes sense from a CIAT perspective as well as from a DTS perspective.

In addition to the chat-service, GirlTalk also caters to schools in their local community (GirlTalk has offices in Copenhagen, Odense, Aalborg, and Aarhus) with empowerment classes for girls between the ages of 13-16 (called EmpowR). These services are offered to schools through cooperative work with legislators and different apparatuses that work to promote mental health among youths. They also have a volunteer based EmpowR course that parents can apply for where the girls meet at GirlTalk once a week for 10 weeks. Both of these services are led by two of the GirlTalk counsellors that receive extra education to properly conduct these courses. GirlTalk also provides a community (called Sisterhood) for females between ages 16-24. Sisterhood is a voluntary service that runs across a time span of 8-13 weeks where the users meet up for two hours per week. There are different help-instances and local organizations that meet up with the users depending on which region the Sisterhood community is established in. Finally, GirlTalk also provides therapy sessions for girls between the ages of 12-24 in Aalborg and Copenhagen. In this paper, these different services beyond the chat-service have not been a major focus for brevity's sake and because the author does not have a personal experience with these services since I am a man. However, they will be lightly touched upon as tools for cultural change without giving an evaluation of how the methods would have to be changed to better fit with the challenges that males face in today's society.

The Author's Background

The choice of topics and focus within this paper is based upon the author's experience working an internship at GirlTalk for three months. Of relevance for this paper was the tasks of conducting quality assurance (QA) of conversations held on the platform as well as psychological evaluations of faithful girls. The QA was conducted at the start of every week and proceeded by analysing every tenth conversation from the preceding week (there was on average around 500 conversations each week conducted by the Aalborg department). The task was to analyse how the counsellors conducted their conversations with the users and whether they followed the framework for conversations set by GirlTalk, however, one naturally had to read the user's part of the conversation as well to understand the context. Additionally, the author conducted more comprehensive psychological evaluations of faithful girls, as well as the QA, which gave a valuable and more comprehensive perspective on what topics were

important for the users with the highest need for someone to talk to. These evaluations were made by extensively reading through conversations held by the user, and in some cases, the author coded the user's responses to see which topics were most important for the user and which conversational topics faced the most resistance or turned negative so that we could create a framework for the counsellors to follow in conducting further conversations with the user. Through this, the author gained a fairly extensive understanding of what types of topics the chat users brought up at GirlTalk, which largely informed the selection of what topics would be the focus for this paper. Additionally, the initial literature review the author conducted was requested by GirlTalk as they wanted to have an extensive understanding of the available literature as they were in the process of considering the establishment of BoyTalk. Therefore, this paper is not only written as a master's thesis, but is also part of a larger work of explorative papers that weighs the different factors that GirlTalk would have to consider for whether there is a need for the service and what they would have to consider when establishing it. This is also a disclosure of the possible conflicts of interest that the author has when writing the text.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, a cultural psychological and philosophical perspective will be used in an attempt to outline how the current culture around gender norms can be harmful for both males and females. This cultural factor will be examined through the lens of the importance identity-building through the construction of the Self, and how cultural narratives such as gender norms are used as shortcuts for identity formation. The conversation is framed around this concept because it provides an easy-to-understand framework through which culturally gendered norms can affect the individual and how one might seek to change these. The Self in the presented frameworks takes on a role that is much closer to the common academic understanding of identity arising from the network of relations and self-perceptions that a person forms throughout their life. Therefore, the words Self and identity will be used interchangeably in this text depending upon what words the original sources employ. In the proceeding sections, these concepts will be applied when relevant to analyse different dynamics of interest as well as how to structure an organization.

The Construction of the Self

Humans are ever changing creatures that adapt to their surroundings. However, perhaps because of the shifting nature of life, we have a strong need for a sense of Self. One

of the most prominent developmental psychological theories is Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963). He posited that humans go through stages of development where there are unique overarching goals for each stage. The fourth stage, adolescence, spans from the ages 11 to 19 and pertains to the struggle between identity vs. role confusion. Adolescents need to find their identity in terms of their profession, gender, politics, and, in certain cases, religion. But it's not always that simple. In other words, the adolescent's task is to discover where they fit in society and their culture, and how they relate to it.

According to this theory the results of each stage, whether positive or negative, affects the outcomes of the proceeding stages. The fifth stage that follows is characterized as intimacy vs. Isolation (ages 20–45) and, accordingly, a failure to achieve a positive and strong sense of identity can lead to issues in establishing intimacy in adulthood. In other words, identity formation is crucial to finding an "ingroup", one of which is gender. However, it should be noted that though identity building is a developmental stage for adolescents, one never stop to form one's own identity, rather it builds upon one's own past understanding of oneself, and one's identity is constantly shifting throughout the lifespan, though the identity that is built during childhood and adolescence largely directs the preceding identity shifts. Since the ages of the fourth stage and fifth stage somewhat overlaps with the age group that would be the target population of BoyTalk, it has a unique opportunity to affect this development in some small parts.

Dialogism

The following theoretical frameworks of DTS and CIAT both have their basis in a dialogistic and dialogical framework, so that too demands an explanation. Dialogism is a meta-theoretical framework for the human sciences (Linell, 2009). It emphasizes the importance of dialogue in understanding language, mind, and the world. However, it should be mentioned that this is not the common usage of the word dialogue which involves two people speaking together in a specific setting, instead dialogue in dialogism means any form of communication you have with a, capital O, *Other*. An *Other* is concrete Others whom we communicate with directly, generalized Other(s), third parties, and collective voices such as cultural norms. For example, when you're reading a book, you are having a dialogue with the author; when you're interfacing with cultural norms, you are having a dialogue with that cultural norm, and so on. Therefore, dialogism has a fundamentally strong *Other-orientation*.

On the opposite pole of the Other, is the Self, which is simply a word for the person whose perspective is taken. However, only concrete others can traditionally constitute a Self within this framework. In short, the Self is an Other to others and Others may be a Self to themselves. Communication (and by extension cognition) always involves *interactions* with Others, and the Self and the Other becomes mutually defined through the *interactions* they have with each other.

Dialogism is also a framework for a *meaningful* world, i.e., what meanings we ascribe to the world, which consists of cognitions, communicative processes and *meaningful* actions (Linell, 2009). Dialogism then holds that the mind is realized in *situated interactions*. The word *situations* refer to specific occasions or encounters, specified in terms of particular times and places, and specific participants. However, situated interactions are embedded in social environments whose *traditions* already have constructed *meanings*. *Traditions* constitute the counterpoint of *situations* and are the sociocultural practices that envelop and transcend each situation. These sociocultural practices entail semiotic resources such as language, concepts, knowledge about the world, identities and norms, etc. which are the foundations upon which communication is made possible. Knowledge, society, and subjectivity are all dynamic and contextual phenomena. In this context, knowledge refers to the competing knowledges which are sustained in institutional and power relations, society refers to differentiated groups and social relations in various states of tension, subjectivity is the shifting I-positions, uncertainty, ambiguity, internal dialogues, and dialogical tensions. All these are produced through dialogue and are dialogical in their structure and dynamics. The meanings and norms have to be oriented to in new situations, i.e., they are made relevant by the participants of the situation depending on a dynamic interplay between the participants idiosyncratic network of participation in different meaningful cultural contexts.

Dialectics

There are several different approaches to dialectics that have been used historically both in western and eastern philosophy and psychology (Eckensberger, 2012). Dialectical thinking deals with dualities that may seem contradictory though they are interdependent. However, it should be noted that dealing with dualities does not necessarily mean that there are only two poles and there may be several ‘poles’ that relate to the original one. In classical Greek philosophy, dialectics referred to a certain form of dialogue, however, the famous philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) popularized it in the West

as a sort of fundamental property of reality that extended beyond just dialogue. At its most basic level, dialectics deals with theses and their antitheses, where the resolution of the contradiction may be to override one over the other or to synthesize a new thesis. In other words, it posits that change happens *because* of contradictions, therefore, it is the contradictory nature of reality that enables change. Another key aspect of this theory is that a new thesis created through synthesis will itself become entangled in another thesis – antithesis relationship which leads to further synthesis. In essence, there is never a final thesis that becomes removed from further antithesis entanglements.

An important aspect of dialectics for the purposes of this paper is that though any thesis demands the existence of an antithesis, it does not necessarily mean that one becomes exposed to the antithesis, or that one recognizes the antithesis as related to one's held thesis (Eckensberger, 2012). For example, the commonly held thesis of patriarchal society was and is reinforced through the structure of society and education the world over, and many may never truly be exposed to the antithesis of matriarchal societies. The small exposures one might have gotten through theories and discussions might simply lead to overriding the antithesis and never a synthesis of a new thesis of a gender-neutral hierarchical society. This dynamic is especially important for the purposes of this paper; we humans are rational creatures and if an antithesis seems like a weak opposition to one's own thesis, then it is more easily disregarded through overriding it. As a cogent example, the thesis of the masculine gender norm of self-reliance (Wylie & Fardley, 2007) may experience an antithesis of one's own failure to be completely self-reliant, which may lead the person synthesise a self-loathing perspective. In this case, they would benefit from an antithesis that it is masculine to be able to confidently assert your needs when necessary. However, since this antithesis is not as present within society, it becomes easily overridden and the more present antithesis of one's own failure becomes the relevant antithesis of which one engages in dialectical process with instead. In short, though a thesis may have an antithesis, the strength of each is highly dependent upon our exposure to them.

Dialogical Theory of Selfhood

The DTS exists within a framework of dialogism, where the Self is thoroughly interdependent with the existence of Others (Bento et al., 2012). Any utterance or action we take have a potential social meaning, which means that we are always addressing Others intentionally or not. However, we cannot ever exactly know the inner workings of an Other,

nor can we telepathically communicate with them. Dialogue then has to be conducted through communicative actions, language, and different signs, which all represent a form of semiotic mediation or in other words *traditions*. They may be thought of as something akin to an abstract third party in the dialogue which primary parties must relate to (Linell, 2009). These do not exist in a vacuum but gain their *meaning* through the context they are placed within, e.g., the *situation*. Furthermore, they don't simply transmit information but shape how we interact with the world around us. It is through dialogical activities that we reach Others, and they are therefore placed at the membrane of contact between Self and Other within DTS (Bento et al., 2012). Any communication is an approximation of commonly held understandings of what different dialogical activities communicate, and any Self or Other may have their own understandings of these based upon the common understandings of them within the network of relations they are situated within. Dialogue is a meaning-making activity, and the concept of communication and cognition are dialogically intertwined (Linell, 2009). They are aspects of partly the same phenomena, rather than referentially distinct phenomena. Our thoughts and feelings arise through and in relation to communication, and to communicate is to share, co-reference, co-invest, and make sense with relational space (Bento et al., 2012). DTS therefore takes the intersubjective and communicational relationship to be the most appropriate pathway to explore and understand Selfhood.

Within DTS, Selfhood is conceived as a product of the continuous dynamic processes that are established between the I, the Other-in-me, and internal audiences that shape the specific positioning of content and processes of subjectivity in the experiential and communicative moment (Bento et al, 2012). That is to say, when we interact with Others, we create a representation, or approximation, of them within the space of the Self that emerges from the inevitable imperfect communication. This Other-in-me may be a more or less accurate representation of the Other, which makes a mismatch between the expected Other, and the incoming signs possible. In a dialectical framework (Eckensberger, 2012), one may view the Other-in-me as a thesis while the real Other represents an antithesis, which fundamentally makes change possible. Throughout our lives, we interact with a score of Others, and by extension, we form an internal audience of Others-in-me, who may or may not be made relevant in any situation in which we interact with one or more Others (Bento et al, 2012). The Self is then not only interacting with real Others but is also engaged in an internal dialogue with the Other-in-me and relevant internal audiences who influence the Self's understanding of the real Other as well as the dialogue it engages with them.

Importantly, DTS also build upon the concepts of positioning theory (Bento et al, 2012). Positioning theory posits that we occupy certain positions within society that bring with them meanings, constraints, and affordances for what actions and behaviours we may engage in. We are constantly occupying different positions within our lives, and each is oriented to according to which positions are relevant for each situation one finds themselves in, and they may dynamically shift as positions are made relevant or irrelevant at a moment-to-moment basis. This also holds true for the space of Self, and the Self is engaged in a continuous process of positioning and repositioning in relation to the Other-in-me and the internal audiences, so that we are not only socially poli-positioned at every moment, but also internally. Accordingly, DTS argues that it is in this difference between Self and Other, both internally and externally, that the possibility of self-consciousness, and personal and shared meaning is generated. Real Others generate increasing internal differentiation of Selfhood, as new relationships are established along with new meaning, new ways of relating to Others and objects, new ways of being positioned and positioning oneself, as well as new subjective states.

In short, DTS builds upon a dialogical framework where intersubjectivity and imperfect communication is the foundation for the construction of the Self through interactions with an Other (Bento et al., 2012). Each of these interactions create a representation of the Other within the space of Self, and these eventually form an internal audience that the Self has to relate to in any given context. The Self is then a poli-positioned nucleus that tries to bridge the gap between their Other-in-me and the Other, as well as trying to maintain or disrupt its positions within the network of real Others and internal audiences that they occupy. Within this framework, the current methods that GirlTalk employs of mentalizing activities could be argued to engage the users of the service to critically analyse their Other(s)-in-me so that they may realign them to the real Other.

Culturally Inclusive Action Theory

CIAT is another theoretical framework that similarly to DTS exists within a dialogistic framework. However, while DTS focuses on the interaction between internal dialogue with an extended field of Others and the real external field of Others giving rise to Selfhood, CIAT explains the emergence of the Self through *goals*, *actions* taken to reach the goal, the *barriers* to those goals that the Self experiences (Eckensberger, 2012). If the barrier cannot be passed by the action performed, then it is necessary to perform a secondary-level action, i.e.,

reflecting upon the previously performed action, the barrier, and the goal. The secondary action level serves as a modulator of the first level, and the subject may change their actions to surpass the barrier, change their perception or understanding of the barrier, or change their goals. If one faces a barrier within this action level, then one has to reflect upon the reflections made, i.e., engage in *self-reflection*, and see at what step of the process the failure arises. In short, primary actions are world-oriented, secondary actions are action-oriented, and the third-level actions are agency-oriented. CIAT argues that it is through these higher-level action modulations that the Self emerges, and accordingly, the capacity for *self-reflective actions* in the form of third-level actions is the origin of Selfhood.

CIAT argues that there are two types of primary actions (Eckensberger, 2012). The first are instrumental actions that are directed at the physical world. However, what is the physical world is a matter of perception, and if the subject holds no mutual respect for the Other, then they may view their agency as instrumental, which leads to strategic action. Strategic actions can be especially pernicious as there are certain cultural affordances that are given to actions taken against non-humans as well as inanimate objects which would be constrained when performed on people. On the other hand, we have communicative actions that is directed at an Other. These types of actions cannot causally bring something about in the Other, the final say in what actions the Other perform in response to the Self's actions is dependent upon their own agency. Accordingly, to bring about change within Others, the Self has to understand their intentions and the Self's means in affecting or cooperating with the Other. Understanding the intentions of an Other is therefore the precondition of primary communicative actions. It is only through the secondary and third-level actions that the Self may come to truly understand the intentions of the Other through reflections upon the barrier that the Other presents themselves as. When we engage in third-level communicative actions, we do not only self-reflect, but we self-reflect on our relationship with the Other as well as the Other's responses to our previous primary actions, thereby piecing together the intentions and agency of the Other. It is therefore also through these higher action levels that the Self becomes defined with the Other as the ground upon which the Self differentiates or identifies with. The action levels also result in schemata of instrumental and social action competencies, which may be oriented to in other situations as effective or ineffective actions to achieve one's goals. Through this process, the Self becomes defined by its relations as well as its action competencies.

However, the theory is termed **Culturally Inclusive** action theory and the way culture fits within this model is that culture forms the framework through which all these actions are performed, and it affects every level of actions (Eckensberger, 2012). CIAT places *action* (or co-action) between the Self and the context (culture), which creates two *action fields*. The first is the external action field, e.g., cultural contexts, and it includes existing shared cultural concepts such as shared interpretational patterns, scripts, and expectations. These are semiotic mediations as they encompass the different ways of communicatively constructing interpretative communicational modes. The second is the internal action field that encompasses the subjective meaning the Self attribute to a *situation*. In other words, how the Self interprets the semiotic mediations. These action fields overlap and are interconnected by the action, which is part of both, thereby connecting every action to the Self's perception of the world and the cultural context the action is performed within. Furthermore, Similarly to DTS, when people communicate in situated interactions, their goal-directed actions can not only potentially meet a barrier in the shape of a real Other or Other-in-me, but the action may face a barrier of the Self having an understanding of Others in the shape of semiotic resources within the internal action field that does not align with the real Other's perception of them, thereby hindering the communicative actions the Self performs. These then have to be negotiated explicitly and/or implicitly by the participants of the situation throughout the interaction to establish an overlap between the Self's and the Other's internal action fields.

Actions therefore result in constructions and co-constructions of cognitive and affective schemata in subjects that they transmit to the world in interactions, which in turn form constraints and affordances (Eckensberger, 2012). In essence, culture emerges on the basis of human actions and reflections, while also having a selective function via actions on humans and their development. We both shape and are shaped by culture concurrently. While regular action theories may explain individual actions in an isolated context, this theory exists within a dialogistic framework where every action is influenced by the situation it is performed within, which is inextricably linked to traditions, i.e., cultural norms and semiotic mediations (Linell, 2009). For example, if an Other forms a barrier to our goals, we rarely modulate our actions to murder them to achieve our goals, since murder is constrained both culturally and through more structural means such as laws and following negative consequences. On the other hand, we wouldn't know to modulate our actions by performing culturally meaningful actions (such as giving a thumbs up to show approval) without receiving that affordance through our culture in the first place.

This explanation of CIAT is highly simplified, and there are many aspects that have not been mentioned for the sake of brevity. These pertain more to deeper explanations for Selfhood, how actions results in morality, the dialectical processes of the action levels, and their emergence as well as the interrelations between action levels and between selfhood and action levels (Eckensberger, 2012). However, the dynamic of action – barrier – goal, the underlying understanding of how culture envelops the action levels, the importance of understanding an Other to communicate with them in an effort to surpass barriers, and finally how Selfhood arises from communicative actions is the most pregnant aspects of the theory for the purposes of this paper. This is also especially relevant in the context of the methodical framework of the Socratic method and mentalizing activities that GirlTalk currently employs. By asking the user poignant questions without a value judgement behind them, the user is then encouraged to engage in secondary or even third-level actions of reflecting upon the barriers they may face on the path to their goals. Additionally, by engaging in mentalizing activities, they may gain a better understanding of the intentions and agencies of Others who may be barriers to their goals. Finally, the structure of GirlTalk works to remove certain barriers it faces in the path towards the goal of helping its users, as well as the barriers the users may feel in seeking help. Through having the service be anonymous, the barrier of fear of judgement becomes removed. Additionally, since the service is free and with no wait times, another barrier to seeking help is removed. Moreover, the gender segregation of the service helps to remove the barrier gender norms/gender mismatch may present themselves as. In essence, this makes this service a low-*barrier-for-entry* one.

While DTS and CIAT may present different pathways to achieve Selfhood, they do not necessarily contradict each other. In fact, Eckensberger (2012) himself argues that ‘‘They [action levels] provide a psychologically useful scheme for organizing and inter-relating a variety of psychological concepts; they therefore also enable links to concepts that have not necessarily been defined originally in an action theory perspective.’’ DTS focuses on how the difference between internal and external relationships create Selfhood while the CIAT focuses on how actions and barriers from Others create the opportunity for reflective actions that define the Self. Additionally, the Other-in-me that DTS argues for neatly fits within CIAT’s concept of the task of understanding the intentions and agency of the Other. They also both rely upon the conception of actions and dialogue respectively, which is for all intents and purposes the same concept, likely as a consequence of both existing within a dialogistic framework. In other words, the DTS concept of semiotic mediations being placed at the

membrane between the Self and the Other presupposes communicative actions to bridge the gap between Self and Other. Additionally, these actions may face barriers from the Other's intentions and agency which forms the incongruence between the Other-in-me and the real Other. In this way, these theories synergistically work together to explain how different actions define the Self and how the interrelation between Self and their understanding of the Other define the Self as well as its action competencies in relation to the Other.

Gender Norms

Identity Heuristics

The human brain is an incredible ‘‘machine’’ that consumes a lot of energy for its size, 20% of the body's energy consumption is used for the brain that only represents 2% of the body's mass (Tomasi et al., 2013). For the sake of efficiency, we have a strong tendency to rely on mental heuristics because it can be demanding to use attentional resources every single time something has to be evaluated (Todd & Gigerenzer, 2000). These heuristics may be created by the individual or inherited by the culture they are situated within, though as CIAT states, the action of forming a heuristic is always enveloped by one's own culture, so the idiosyncratic heuristics one forms are always influenced by the culture that the Self is situated within, i.e., the internal action field (Eckensberger, 2012). These heuristics can also be known as cultural narratives (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). As has been discussed, the cultural narratives can be seen as a form of Other that becomes an Other-in-me that influences internal dialogue processes within a DTS framework (Bento et al, 2012). These narratives can be either positive or negative, focused on an individual or society, and contained or far-reaching (Robinson & Hawpe, 1986). Constructing an identity can be a long and arduous process that demands a lot of cognitive resources, and employing the desired ingroup's narratives can make the process less demanding. In this sense, gender norms are cultural narratives that we can adopt to establish an identity more easily. Many groups that one may identify with may be chosen by the individual, i.e., through different activities, interests, and social participations. However, gender norms are closely linked to the real physical differences between the sexes, such as the primary (penis/vagina) and secondary (body shape/physique/etc.) sexual characteristics. You are treated differently by society at large based on your externally presenting gender. In other short, gender norms are often chosen *for* you rather than *by* you, and they end up shaping you.

Power Dynamics

The differences between males and females in society are highly dependent upon gendered norms (Beauvoir, 1997). The way we dress, speak, think, act and aspire are all defined in part by how society enforces gender norms. Gender norms are among the first narratives that we assume into our identity as it is enforced upon us by society from the moment we are born. We are *raised* as either a boy or a girl, with all the consequences that has for the development of the person. The conception of a dichotomous relationship between males and females, i.e., the concept of masculinity and femininity, is the framework through which these gender norms are enforced. In most cultures, masculinity embodies someone who is physically strong, confident, assertive, self-reliant, emotionally stable/stoic, unempathetic, and has a high social status through wealth or social power (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). On the other hand, the conception of femininity has been that of a person who is weak, diffident, agreeable, dependent, emotionally vulnerable, empathetic, and subservient. The dichotomy created here is that of one between an oppressor and the oppressed (Beauvoir, 1997).

As an example, it is problematic that confidence and self-reliance is seen as a masculine trait. The dichotomous relationship between genders implies that since confidence is a masculine trait, diffidence and dependency is a feminine trait. Rather than classifying confidence and self-reliance as an inherently masculine trait, it would be better to view it as a positive *human* trait. It bears mentioning that these traits should likely be viewed in an Aristotelian framework of the golden mean, e.g., a spectrum, where too much confidence becomes over-confidence and too little becomes diffidence (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./1925). However, as we will see, it seems unlikely to seek to create a gender-neutral framework of human qualities currently. In many ways, the feminine traits are treated as the negative pole of the masculine ones, which is part of why Simon De Beauvoir (1997) called women *The Second Sex*. I suspect that this is partly a product of the natural human inclination of denigrating the outgroup (Myers et al., 2014; Dion, 1973), where men who had a higher standing in society (ingroup) enforced these negative stereotypes upon women (outgroup).

As we see with other ingroup/outgroup dynamics, a person is not only trying to associate themselves with their own assigned gender roles (ingroup), but to disassociate with the other gender (outgroup; Brewer, 1999). This oppositional relationship constructs an inherent power imbalance where the man should confidently and assertively act upon the world around them without empathy while the women are supposed to be empathetic and

reliant upon the men to assert their needs. Though this dynamic goes both ways in the case of ingroup/outgroup dynamics, when the nature of the relationship has been that of the oppressor and oppressed, the party with the power (men) are able to enforce their stereotypes on the party with less power (women) with greater efficacy. The oppressor's thesis then overrides the antithesis of equality between the ingroup and the outgroup, and it becomes an established reality that is reinforced through structural components of society which can be hard to disprove without a significant push in the opposite direction (Eckensberger, 2012). These theses then become barriers to rebellion for the oppressed and it is often combined with infantilizing (children have less agency under most legal frameworks) and/or dehumanizing language (e.g., labelling jews as 'vermin') that promotes instrumental actions against the oppressed group. It is not a coincidence then that the topic of objectification has been such an important part of feminist philosophy (Beauvoir, 1997) This removal of the oppressed's agency enables the oppressor to act with more affordances in their actions towards the barriers that they may be in the oppressors path to their goals (Eckensberger, 2012). We can also clearly see this tendency in historical power imbalances such as that between the nazis and jews, the white Americans and black slaves or any of the colonized nations during colonization.

There has also been a concerning rise of fascistic movements worldwide (University of California, Berkley, 2024; Focus on the Global South, 2024) which, as of writing this text, has culminated in the ascension of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America, which has widespread consequences as the U.S is the largest exporters of media in the world (International Trade Administration, n.d.). Wikipedia (n.d.) defines fascism as "[...] a far-right, authoritarian, and ultranationalist political ideology and movement. It is characterized by a dictatorial leader, centralized autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy, subordination of individual interests for the perceived interest of the nation or race, and strong regimentation of society and the economy". All these factors establish a hierarchical culture and society that closely align with traditional oppressive gender norms, which makes it less surprising that the gender dichotomy becomes an obsession for fascistic states both historically and currently. Fascism's structure provides affordances to the oppressors while erecting manyfold barriers to the oppressed to maintain its hierarchy and enable the government to enact extreme measures on the oppressed (Eckensberger, 2012). There has already been a score of regressive policies and actions taken by the Trump administration to oppress women and undesirables such as immigrants and

political opponents (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Dreisbach, 2025). It is not a surprise then that during his campaign for presidency, Trump employed dehumanizing terms that promoted instrumental actions such as calling his political opponents ‘vermin’ (C-Span, 2023) and saying that immigrants are ‘poisoning the blood of our country’ (Pengelly, 2023), directly echoing Hitler and the Nazi party’s, as well as Mussolini and the Italian fascistic party’s rhetoric (Colvin, 2023). Fascism rises by suppressing and thereby overriding all other antitheses so that their thesis may sustain itself. The need for an antithesis to the repressive gender norms of society that help to maintain fascistic governments and movements is therefore ever more present today in this worldwide democratic backslide than in the preceding decades.

According to DKR (Det Kriminal Preventative Råd, n.d.) men are the perpetrator of violent crime nine out of ten times, which might, in part, reflect the violent and oppressive nature of the masculine gender norms combined with the instrumental approach many men might have to women, or even other men who are perceived as ‘weaker’ than themselves. This places men at a risk of victimizing others, leading to further issues for these victims beyond who may themselves become the victimizer through negative learned behaviours. This whole section has been very ‘doom and gloom’ however, on a more positive note, looking at the statistics today, we know that males and females are far more similar than they are different in the aggregate (Myers et al., 2014; Madsen et al, 2022). However, it is easy to see how small differences could create a butterfly effect of cultural and narrative differences through ingroup and outgroup dynamics in a dialectical relationship across thousand or even tens of thousands of years. Breaking these foundational cultural norms may be an insurmountable task, but the emerging feminist movement in the last century has lent some credence to the idea that cultural change is both possible in the long-term and the short-term. However, as recent years have clearly shown, this shift is not a permanent one, and the fight for gender equality will never truly be over as political shifts may influence societies to become more regressive and oppressive. As CIAT states (Eckensberger, 2012), every action we take contribute to the co-constructive project that is culture.

Males and Gendered Norms

While feminism in many ways liberated females from the oppressive gender norms of femininity, allowing them to operate within traditionally masculine roles (Beauvoir, 1997), males did not have a similar large-scale movement. Because of the inherent oppressive nature

of the patriarchal system, the female liberation movement wasn't just about their individual freedom or rights, but it was also about males' loss of control and power which are two key components of the gendered expectations of masculinity. Control and power only exist when someone is situated in a power imbalance, therefore, females' liberation was not only an attack against the oppressive power structures enforced upon females, but also an attack on the very concept of masculinity. It is important to note again that gendered norms are socially constructed (Beauvoir, 1997; Eckensberger, 2012). While they may be based on some real differences between males and females, nobody will map onto it *exactly*. There is not a maximally masculine or feminine person, it is simply a spectrum of traits (Boehm, 1930). However, since it maps onto the physically bound concept of sex, our mind plays a trick on us. It creates a false dichotomy where the perceived binary of sex gets superimposed on gender norms, creating a situation in which the gendered norms get essentialized to the sex of the person. That is to say that the gendered norms are perceived as similarly immutable as sex.

When someone tries to break these boundaries, we can perceive it as an attack on our identity because there are so many pervasive narratives surrounding gender norms that constitute our self (Todd & Gigerenzer, 2000). Similarly, feeling invaded and threatened some males have resisted and doubled down, leading to countless reactionary movements such as the 'red pill' movement in modern times spearheaded by abrasive figures such as Andrew Tate who espouse a traditional and oppressive view of gender roles (Barrett, 2023). From a dialectical perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), instead of synthesising a new thesis in the face of the antithesis of feminist ideology, these males may feel a need to present themselves in a hyper masculine way to override the antithesis with their own thesis of gender expression, i.e., their externally presenting identity. These factors create a situation in which the masculine gender roles are self-reinforcing itself to maintain the power imbalance. This mechanism of self-reinforcement creates a situation in which males have had a harder time adopting the feminine traits than the other way around (Beauvoir, 1997). These traits are of great importance to the efficacy of chat-services such as a potential BoyTalk, because the difficulties for men in identifying themselves with the traits of agreeableness, emotional vulnerability, sociability and empathy, while also identifying themselves with the traits of self-reliance and strength, creates a unique problem for them with regards to help-seeking behaviour. Men tend to self-isolate and suffer in silence, because this is what is seen as masculine (Wendt & Shafer, 2016; Juvrud & Rennels, 2017).

As stated previously, we usually go towards the path of least resistance (I.e., the path that requires the least mental resources), therefore, it can be easier to defend the current narratives rather than risk having to change parts of your identity (Todd & Gigerenzer, 2000). This is especially the case since gender norms are so pervasive in society by being reinforced through a network of cultural norms surrounding it as well as being reinforced through embodiments of them like gendered bathrooms, differences in availability of services, differences in fashion, hair length, use of makeup, etc. Therefore, from a dialectical perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), any antithesis towards the pervasive gender norm thesis faces a solidified embodied resistance that attempts to override it instead of synthesizing with it. It may be easier to change culture in a consistent and achievable way by not providing an antithesis that is external to that reinforcing network, but as an antithesis arising from within it. Instead of having to change your internal understanding of the world in a major way, the person can then update their internalized narratives by synthesizing new understandings of what the gender norms actually represent. For example, framing emotional vulnerability as an example of strength allows males to incorporate this idea into their existing framework of gender norms. Additionally, this allows the antithesis to avoid becoming a challenge to the entire thesis of gender norms, but a subcategory within it. From a DTS perspective (Bento et al, 2012), this means that one should attempt to position the antithesis that becomes the Other-in-me as a voice that occupies the position of masculinity rather than femininity so that the voice becomes a part of the ingroup that the Self is positioned as. Gender narratives, e.g., theses, are often highly interconnected and interdependent upon a network of synthesis relationships, so if one narrative gets uprooted it could create a cascade effect of questioning the others as well, so as to remain internally consistent. In short, the threshold of change for cultural narratives surrounding gender can be prohibitively high, however once it has been reached, a cascade effect may occur. For example, synthesizing the antithesis of emotional vulnerability within the thesis of masculine strength may lead the Self to question the masculine thesis of self-reliance. In other words, the synthesis becomes an antithesis to another thesis to engage the Self in new processes of dialectical synthesis.

It is important to keep in mind that gender norms are something which is taught throughout a child's development. A child is not born carrying preconceptions of what is masculine or feminine, it is transmitted to them by the culture around them. It is then largely adults who dominate culture and are the purveyors of it. The relationship between adults and children can be characterized in an oppressor-oppressed dynamic, since they are largely the

ones who enact force upon the other. Therefore, they are able to transmit their views of the world on their children with much greater force than the other way around. We are a product of our environment and the cultural narratives around males, masculinity and gender differences are subtly and not so subtly incepted into our Self in increasingly complex ways as we grow older and we too end up becoming the purveyors of it. Understanding the complex relationship between gender norms and how they are transmitted is crucial for examining the unique difficulties males face and how one may counteract them. However, it should be noted that there are some differences in gendered norms and expectations based on age. An example of one of these is the difference in how accepting society is of a male's violent behaviour, such as daily acts of physical violence being somewhat expected from boys and unexpected from men. Children therefore have their own unique gender norms that evolves across their development as society comes to enforce new expectations for their gendered behaviours. BoyTalk's cultural role in society is therefore of especially high import, since the age groups it seeks to influence (ages 12-24) are children, teenagers, and adults who are still developing their understanding of gender norms and are constantly in flux as to what society expects from them. If BoyTalk's messaging through direct and indirect means can become an Other-in-me, e.g., an antithesis, that children can be influenced by in a positive direction, then that will largely be a success.

Summary

Culture is a powerful and pervasive force that envelops every aspect of our daily lives as well as our development. It becomes a voice in the space of our Self through the interactions we have with it and Others who themselves are enveloped within it. The Self then becomes preoccupied with positioning themselves with the powerfully positioned Other that becomes an eternal watchful observer and judge of the Self's internal and external dialogue. It acts as both an enabler and barrier to our actions, modulating what form of primary, secondary, and third-level actions we may engage in, thereby influencing what the Self becomes defined as through the action processes it performs. Among one of the most powerful tools of cultural enforcement is the concept of the masculine and feminine. It is ever present from the moment the doctor announces the sex of the child and changing these norms can be very difficult. We assume these narratives around gender into our identity, and it becomes a core thesis of it. This is especially the case for the conception of masculinity as it occupies a dominant position in the traditional gender dichotomy. This means that a movement that seeks to free males from their own oppression should focus on how males can

adopt new traits into their own identity rather than seeking to liberate males by proxy. Furthermore, by framing the inclusion of these traits as an extension of masculinity rather than an opposition to it, one can avoid the theses from becoming positioned as an outgroup within the space of Self, which makes it easier for males to assume it into their identity by synthesizing new theses of what it is to be masculine.

Masculine Specific Issues

The next four sections are meant as examples to integrate and apply the framework of understanding that has been presented so far. These examples have also been chosen because they are examples of negative consequences that arise from the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, they have been chosen and presented in the current order as they are highly interconnected. Finally, based upon the author's experience with GirlTalk it is assumed that these topics are likely to be important topics for the users while also being cultural avenues that BoyTalk could enact a positive change upon.

Bullying

It was mentioned previously that most violent crimes are perpetrated by men, however one avenue of male violence that was not mentioned is that of bullying, which is a very common issue for boys and young men. Studies consistently show that boys are more frequently perpetrators of bullying and more frequently the victims of bullying (Smith et al., 2019). This tendency is also reinforced culturally through common narratives, or theses, such as "boys will be boys". Being bullied can be an extremely traumatic experience and can predispose the victims to be at significantly higher risk of being diagnosed with depression later in life (Lund et al., 2009). Furthermore, the bullies are at risk of later externalising disorders and criminality, mainly violent crime and illicit drug misuse (Klomek et al., 2015). In fact, both the bullies and victims are at risk of later drug use (Valdebenitno et al., 2015). There are many other negative consequences that may arise from bullying beyond those mentioned here. While the prominence of bullying perpetrators among boys can be partly explained by the difference in physical strength between boys and girls, it is likely not the whole picture.

One of the tenets of masculinity is that of achieving a higher social status and acting with assertiveness (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). One way of embodying this is to push someone else down on the social hierarchy. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the boys

have the goal of achieving a higher social status, and they then perform the actions of bullying. Since bullying is more culturally permissible among boys (Hellström & Beckman, 2020; Mishna et al., 2021), these bullies often do not face a barrier when performing their actions, and they become crystallized as action competencies that they later rely upon. Raising the barrier to physical violence later in their lives often means that their bullying behaviour shifts to less violent means, though still relying upon the competencies they have constructed. Bullying can also be a representation of the masculine ideal of physical strength, where the person who occupies the role of the bully is able to display their superiority through sheer force.

The victims of bullying tend to have poorer social skills from the outset, which are not improved by the bullying experience (Fox & Boulton, 2005). From a DTS perspective (Bento et al, 2012), the victim forms an Other-in-me of the bully's derisive voice through the consistent abuse that poisons their internal dialogue. The isolation these victims also usually experience (Fox & Boulton, 2005) means that the negative voices occupy a larger part of the network of internal audiences stemming from the decreased presence of Others. Furthermore, the bully naturally assumes a position of power within that inner dialogue, just as it does externally. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the victim that fails to receive help or escape their abuse slowly learns that there are insurmountable barriers to their actions, and their schema of action competencies become limited, especially with regards to help-seeking. Bullying has serious long-term consequences for the victim and may very likely give them future problems in establishing relationships, both friendly and romantically, and understanding the complexities of sexual relationships (Fox & Boulton, 2005). Sometimes the victim may even try to adopt the bully's action competencies so that they themselves become the bullies later in life. The victim can then become entangled within a negative spiral of victimization where they end up hurting others through their maladaptive patterns of behaviour that they learned through their victimhood, while the bully is empowered to continue their spree of violence and victimization. There is probably no way to completely stop bullying from happening, but there are steps that can be taken to improve the culture of youth violence by seeking to demolish the strict and maladaptive gender roles that currently exist and enable it (Hellström & Beckman, 2020; Mishna et al., 2021). Additionally, BoyTalk is in an invaluable position to become a positive voice within the victim's, as well as the bully's, internal dialogue. For the bullies, they may benefit from engaging in mentalizing activities which may allow them to gain a better understanding of the consequences their

actions have for Others, while also gaining a better understanding of the intentions of Others so that they may achieve their goals through less violent means. On the other hand, the bullying victims may especially benefit from the radical acceptance approach, as their common experience and expectations of Others may be that of derision and not positive regard and acceptance. However, they may have a very limited schema of action competencies related to help-seeking behaviour, so the service being a low-barrier-to-entry one gives them the opportunity get the foot in the door. If the victim experiences positive feedback from engaging in the action of seeking help, i.e., they reach their goals, they may also develop new action competencies that allow them to seek further help from other people in their lives or even more comprehensive help such as a psychologist or other help-instances, potentially stopping the spiral of victimization.

Finding a Partner

One important avenue to examine is the difference between genders in their approaches to finding a partner. Gender and sex are closely linked, and with that link comes an inherent connection between sexual orientation and gender. It is fairly established that sexual orientation is not something that is learned (Bailey et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is strong evidence for a close relationship between sexual attraction and secondary sexual characteristics (Fernández, 2006). However, though gender expression is *related* to sex through secondary sexual characteristics, which is somewhat physically bound (secondary sexual characteristics can be manipulated through push-up bras, differently fitted clothing, etc.), it is mainly *defined* by semiotic mediation. In other words, all other ways of expressing one's gender beyond those that are biologically determined. Herein lies the confusing relationship between gender, sex and sexual orientation. A person's sexual attraction is towards the desired sex and their secondary sexual characteristics, however, as gender expression becomes superimposed upon sex culturally, the way in which people display this sexual dimorphism goes beyond their visual appearance. Becoming an attractive male or female is then not only about displaying the visual appearance of one but *acting* like one as well. A person's desirability is then, in part, tied to how well they embody the gender norms of society and represent the desired sex. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), acting out one's gender then becomes an action competency towards the goal of finding a partner. However, as stated previously, there is no maximally masculine or feminine person, because gender expression is a spectrum where one may embody traits from both ends

(Boehm, 1930). However, the closer a person can match this culturally determined ideal, the more they represent the object of desire for the other gender in heterosexual relationships.

A key part of masculinity is having a high social status (Wylie & Fardley, 2007) and a way to display this is by being desirable to the other sex. Similarly, many of the attributes that women most desire in their partners, e.g., status, social dominance, are also the male's fulfilment of gender expression, which cannot be assessed from a man's physical appearance alone (Hill & Buss, 2008). Research suggests that individuals attempting to make sense of such ambiguous social stimuli tend to rely on simple heuristics that incorporate available contextual information to increase the accuracy of their judgments. One of these are the desirability of the man to other women. Women rate men who are surrounded by other women as more attractive than when they were alone or with other men, while the opposite is true for men. Using the presence of other women as an initial mate-value barometer allows women to gain valuable, relatively honest information regarding the quality of an unknown man without incurring the costs associated with gaining the information first hand. In short, this quality that is sought is then partly the man's ability to embody the gender norms of society through being desirable to the opposite sex.

These factors and many others synthesize to create the situation in which a male's identity and self-worth is dependent upon their attractiveness to the opposite sex (Penke & Denissen, 2008). From a dialectical perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the thesis is then the male successfully finding a partner, while the failure to find a partner becomes the antithesis, which they may synthesize into a thesis of worthlessness and undesirability (Penke & Denissen, 2008). For some, this may also synthesize into a new thesis of hatred for women because of perceived negative qualities within them or society that makes the person unable to find a partner. This is apparent within the involuntary celibacy (incell) community, where themes of hatred towards females are endemic (Hoffman et al, 2020). From a DTS perspective (Bento et al., 2012), the failure to find short- and long-term partners can also limit the Self's internal dialogue through the absence of voices from Others that could provide valuable perspectives on female voices, which further exemplifies the incell's propensity for hatred towards females because of their failure to understand them. Furthermore, as the theory states, the Self becomes mutually defined through the interactions it has with the Other, and in the absence of a partner to which one can define oneself with, one has to rely upon a social network of Others, which may be limited for people who fail to find a partner. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the failure to cross the barriers to finding a partner may

lead to the Self changing its perspective of the barriers by treating the Other instrumentally, which may lead to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape, which will be further explored in its own section later. On the other hand, they may develop a less extensive action competency schema where they eventually give up chasing their goals as they become unobtainable, essentially dooming them to a life of loneliness and unachieved goals, with all the negative consequences that may have.

A service such as BoyTalk needs to be especially mindful of the importance in finding a partner for males. Looking at the rise of the male incel community these past 20 years and the increasingly violent consequences from it (Hoffman et al, 2020) definitely gives credence to the idea that there is a need for a platform where the males who fail to attract a partner can speak about their feelings and get support in a non-toxic environment that affirms their struggle and the consequences from it without placing blame. BoyTalk could be in an invaluable position to provide both immediate help to these people and also counter negative cultural narratives surrounding gender and attraction so that the harmfulness of being an incel may be reduced. These users may also benefit from mentalizing activities so that they may gain a deeper understanding of the intentions of the partners they seek, affording them useful communicative actions that help them find a partner. This analysis is, of course, an oversimplification. It had the singular focus of examining the relationship between gender, sex, secondary sexual characteristics, gender norms and heterosexual attraction. There are potentially many nuances that is missed by not including other modes of attraction, which a future analysis could benefit from including.

Small Penis Anxiety and Micropenises

It might seem crude to talk about the symptom of having a micropenis, however, it is a succinct example because the primary sexual characteristic of having a penis is so closely linked with the secondary sexual characteristics through common myths such as “big hands = big penis” or “big feet = big penis” (Nazar et al., 2011; Shah & Christopher, 2002), which further entangles it with gender. The penis, particularly in its erect state, has historically been and presently is a symbol of masculinity (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). In many cultures it has come to symbolise attributes such as “largeness, strength, endurance, ability, courage, intelligence, knowledge, dominance over men, possession of women; a symbol of loving and being loved”. Furthermore, because sex and gender norms are so closely linked, the primary and secondary sexual characteristics have a large importance for self-identification with

masculinity or femininity. The penis can be seen as a physical and embodied representation of the masculine traits and deficiencies in this is not only a “physical defect” but a sort of failure as a male. Having an incongruence between the normative expectations for one’s gender and the way one perceives themselves can lead to feelings of inadequacy and distress (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). This can be modelled as a dialectical relationship (Eckensber, 2012), where a large penis becomes a thesis for masculinity while the reality of having a small penis becomes the antithesis, which synthesize to a thesis, and thereby a feeling, of not being “man enough”. These concerns, when severe, can lead a male to go to extreme lengths to try to change the size of his penis (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). Some males might even have what is called “small penis anxiety” (SPA). SPA is found in males with a normal-sized penis but who are anxious about the size of the penis, in contrast to males who have a micropenis, making it a form of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD; Wylie & Fardley, 2007; Jeong et al., 2020). Within a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the Self may have the goal of having sex or finding a partner, and their small penis imagined or not erects a barrier towards that goal. They may then perform secondary action modulations where they engage in actions to desperately increase the size of their penis. It is important to remember here that our perception of barriers is based upon what we think the Other’s intentions are. In this case, the Self might wrongly assume that their perceived small penis is a barrier to achieving their goals, and third-level reflections upon the intentions of the Other might reveal that the barrier was an imaginary one, i.e., mentalizing activities.

BDD has been described for more than a century; it is a psychiatric condition and is observed as a fixation on an imaginary flaw in the physical appearance (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). In cases in which a minor defect truly exists, the individual with BDD has an inordinate degree of anguish. People with BDD frequently develop major depressive episodes and are at risk of suicide. They might also show violent behaviour toward their treatment providers that can cause concern to clinical caregivers, which is something to be mindful about for BoyTalk. In many cases, individuals with BDD have drastic social and occupational dysfunctions that might progress to the point of social isolation. There is embarrassment and fear of being scrutinized or mocked, which often causes these individuals to avoid social situations and intimate relationships. As victims of poor self-image, these individuals typically do not show sufficient social skills and are frequently single or divorced (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). In these cases, one could frame it within both a DTS (Bento et al, 2012) and CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012) as the Self receives the voices of Others, i.e., gender

norms, that gain a position of influence over the Self which impacts their internal dialogue through a dialectical process of synthesizing a self-perception of not being “man enough” and thereby their understanding of the intentions of Other people, which erects barriers to their goal of establishing both platonic and romantic relationships. This dynamic then becomes self-reinforcing as the isolation creates a situation where the gender norms become one of few voices within the space of Self, instead of one of many.

There is little reliable data about the prevalence of SPA and micropenises, possibly because of the shameful nature of the disorder or perceived defect (Wylie & Fardley, 2007). However, one study found that 66% of men rated their penis as average, 22% as large and 12% as small (Lever et al., 2006). Of this selection, 46% of the ones with an average penis, 14% of the ones with a large penis, and 91% of the ones with a small penis wanted a larger penis. In total, that means that almost half (44.36%) of all men experience some form of psychological distress regarding the size of their penis. This same study found that 62.7% of men said that their concerns started in childhood, while 37.3% said that their concerns began during their teenage years. This is possibly an enormous issue in society that currently has no organisations or initiatives that addresses it in a sufficient manner, again likely because of the shameful and taboo laden nature of the topic. Furthermore, considering the age group of when these problems initiate, an online-counselling service that caters to developing boys may have the opportunity to reach this group in a way that few others can. These users may benefit from all three approaches GirlTalk employs in their conversations by having the user engage in higher actions levels to change their understanding of the intentions of Others and by gaining an Other-in-me with positive regard to hopefully influence their internal dialogue in a positive direction.

Consent

For many centuries, consent went only one way, and it was the male’s or a father’s duty to consent through arranged marriages (Wikipedia, “Arranged Marriage”, n.d.). Some countries *still* have extremely skewed laws where the rapist can be exempt from punishment if the “behaviour of the victim contributed” to the rapist performing the act, in essence being laws that validates the common defence of “but look at how you were *dressed*” (Kruglikova, 2024). Furthermore, many countries had and still have, no laws concerning marital rape or widely tolerates it (Wikipedia, “Marital Rape Laws by Country”, n.d.). This lax attitude towards the female’s consent reflects the extreme oppression they have faced. It should be no

surprise then that consent is a culturally important topic presently. This issue dominates a lot of cultural discourse, especially surrounding red pill figures such as Andrew Tate who explicitly said that he moved to Romania, where he is currently embroiled within a human trafficking lawsuit, because of his concerns about the “strict” consent laws in America (Barrett, 2023). “Who is Andrew Tate?” was also the most searched sentence started with “Who is” on Google in the U.S. in 2022 (Google, 2022). The popularity of figures such as him who champion traditional gender roles and violent sexual behaviour towards females show that this is a serious issue that is still getting resolved, and BoyTalk can and should take an active role in changing this much too common rape culture.

Of the sexual crimes committed in total from 1980, 720 of the perpetrators were men while 7 were women, according to Danmarks Statistik (n.d.). This is a difference in effect size of over 10.000% between men and women. The statistics from 2022 were 2533 men and 95 women which constitutes a difference in effect size of over 2600%, which is *still* a lot, but a substantially smaller gap. The population has risen from 5.1 to 5.8 million people in this time period meaning that the amount of people reported for sexual crimes have risen from 0.014% of the population to 0.045% which is a rise of over 300%. The enormous rise in sexual crime statistics is in large parts a consequence of a previous underreporting of sexual crimes rather than an actual increase (Amnesty International Danmark, n.d.). However, the rapid shift in the rate of reported sexual crimes for men compared with women in this period is of particular interest. It is likely to be a change that stems from cultural reasons such as an underreporting of sexual crimes perpetrated against men stemming from masculine gender norms being highly incompatible with expressing moments of weakness and submission. Clearly, masculine gender norms aren’t as highly pervasive in modern society as compared with the 80s. This is another convincing reason for the importance of challenging stereotypical gender norms so that males may seek help and vindication. However, part of the explanation probably also arises from a cultural shift in how one approaches and understands consent. While it might look damning initially, the statistics also give hope that one can change it by changing culture.

The discourse around consent can be a very difficult one. It might be relevant to caveat this with saying that it is unlikely that most people regard themselves as a “bad person”. Most people in the modern world are socialized to know that rape is not a *good* thing and do not therefore want to be the perpetrators of it (Eccleston & Owen, 2007). Convicted rapists often hold pro-offending attitudes and beliefs that maintain the deviant behaviour. These

attitudes or beliefs function in sexual offenders to minimize, rationalize, or justify offending behaviour. Rapists also score lower than the general population on social skills, but higher on assertiveness (Quinsey, 1986). This seems to be a dangerous combination that makes a person more likely to assert their needs while not understanding the other person's boundaries. There may be a substantial part of sexual crime perpetrators demographic that "inadvertently" becomes rapists through the combination of cognitive distortions, misunderstandings of consent and/or high assertiveness. From a DTS perspective (Bento et al., 2012), the poor social skills consequently lead the male to have fewer platonic and sexual relationship with females, which means that they have fewer Others-in-me who form their internal audience within the space of Self, which by extension means that they have a poorer understanding of their perspective. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the offender may engage in strategic actions to remove the barrier's, i.e., the Other's, agency or change their understanding of the Other's intentions so that their responses are seen as affirmations rather than rejections to permit them to engage in actions that lead to sexual assault and rape. Mentalizing activities have a proven benefit (Eccleston & Owen, 2007), which could be explained by them engaging the user in third-level actions of gaining a deeper understanding of the victim, both real and potential, to reduce the occurrence of sexually impermissible actions.

This group of people who inadvertently becomes rapists through their socialization should be a key target demographic for BoyTalk. It is easy to say "you just need to stop if they say no" or "just say no", however, this can be a difficult situation to navigate for both the victim and the victimizer. This can especially so be the case for people with poor social skills (Geer et al, 2000; Schry & White, 2013), or for individuals with ADHD (Ngo et al, 2018; Ohlsson Gotby et al, 2018), which we will see later are both more common among males. Others might have taken part in a culture both physically or on the internet, which have instilled within them harmful narratives surrounding sex and consent, such as incell or red pill communities (Hoffman et al, 2020). Because of the inherent value proposition that is connected with the prospect of having many sexual partners for a males' identity, males get pushed towards desperately seeking that form of validation from society. An incongruence between societies expectations of them and their lived experience might make males synthesize a thesis of *entitlement* to sex. In tandem with the inherent power imbalance between masculinity and femininity, it can create a situation in which the female's boundaries are easily disregarded or crossed. A service such as BoyTalk is then in a position to provide

both immediate advice to males about consent directly in its interactions with males and through its externally presenting material such as marketing, while also indirectly influencing it by acting as an antithesis to masculine gender norms to promote males to become offenders.

Summary

A good example of the negative effects from the masculine gender roles is the case of bullying and physical violence. It is much more common for males to both be the bully and the victim. This relationship may arise from the cultural norms of males being of a higher social status and physically strong, and so the way they embody these roles is by oppressing other males to rise higher in the hierarchy themselves. Another example is how this power structure creates the expectation for males to attract females, and how this can lead to a more negative effect on males when they fail to attract anyone. Furthermore, the condition of SPA or having a micropenis may be moderated in part by the connection between sexual characteristics, gender and desirability. Finally, consent intersects with all these factors to create a situation where males transgress another person's most intimate boundaries at far higher rates than females. These cases paint a picture of the negative effects that arises from masculine gender norms and how they often can synergize with each other. BoyTalk's goal should therefore not only be to provide immediate help but also to enact cultural change so that these harmful gender roles can hopefully be lessened in their effect.

Material Conditions

Though the feminist movement have worked towards equality, society is still far off from true equality. These following sections will look at some possible material differences between genders that aren't as directly linked with the masculine/feminine gender dichotomy such as academic attainment, loneliness, subjective experience of well-being, suicide, and neurodivergence. Specific psychiatric disorders were omitted because the diagnostic criteria for being diagnosed with them is the same across both genders, and because GirlTalk does not seek to diagnose or treat psychiatric disorders. In the author's experience with GirlTalk, the users would rarely bring up psychiatric disorders, and if they did it was more in the context of them giving a biographical account of them. However, there are certain differences that a more comprehensive study into the subject could explore for the purposes of the therapy that BoyTalk could potentially provide, though this has been covered extensively in currently available research. In contrast to specific psychiatric disorders, neurodivergence is still an emerging topic in which most of the scientific community is in a consensus that they are

highly gendered and that the diagnostic criteria most likely do not capture the whole breadth of gender differences (Bölte et al, 2023). As such it was regarded as an important avenue for investigation more so than the psychiatric disorders. However, it should be noted again that BoyTalk would not be a service that seeks to diagnose its users through the chat-service, rather, it could be relevant to have some expectations regarding the behaviour of neurodivergent users that are likely to use the service, so that the counsellors can have an understanding of certain difficulties users may have with engaging with the service. This should by no means be regarded as a complete view of the gender differences, but rather as a pioneering analysis of the current available research for gender differences with a gendered chat-service in mind.

Currently there exists few generalized chat services that caters exclusively to boys and/or men, and none with only counsellors who are men, that have been studied (Moltzau, 2023). It is then difficult to give any specific predictions as to what one may expect because of this extreme lack of data. This is even more so the case for specific studies into the efficacy of online-counselling services like BoyTalk for neurodivergent people. As such this will, like the previous section, merely be conjecture based on the current best available evidence and BoyTalk could provide the opportunity for some truly landmark studies into these topics in the eventual future where it is realized.

Academic Attainment

When schools were first built, they were almost exclusively for males. It was thought that females did not have the faculties to be able to learn the complexities of academia (Munk, 2008), however, the last century has shown just how wrong this assumption was. The gender gap in academic attainment and achievement has been steadily decreasing and even increasing in the opposite direction where females now significantly outperform males (Hutters et al., 2013; Munk, 2008). However, somewhat paradoxically, a meta-analysis by CEFU (Center For Ungdomsforskning) found that boys are less worried about their academic outcomes, though this may not lead to entirely positive outcomes for boys (Hutters et al, 2013). There is a form of cultural expectation that boys are supposed to appear relaxed and without worry, which consequently leads to them not taking their academic performance as seriously leading to lower attendance rates and less effort in schoolwork, in essence viewing unpreparedness and uninterest as a sort of virtue. There are studies that show that girls experience more stress related to academic achievement and tests, but on the other spectrum this lack of stress from

boys could be another reflection of the culture surrounding their stance towards achievement in school. Sometimes stress is a natural response to a situation that may have lasting consequences which can motivate us to work harder to attain our goals and sometimes it may lead to the inability to perform to the desired degree. Similar to high levels of stress, the lack of stress does not necessarily lead to better outcomes in the long term, and it is important to find a healthy balance between stress and apathy. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the boys may initially have the goal of performing well at school, however, that goal meets a barrier in the form of gender norms that boys shouldn't care about school, and they then modulate their goals to align with the barrier instead of trying to surpass it. From a DTS perspective (Bento et al, 2012), the boys may inherit the voices of their parents who promote academic competency; however, it becomes drowned out by the forceful voice of the culture, and every Other boy within the school who hold the same attitudes, within the space of Self.

Failure to achieve academically can also lead to a lower general self-esteem, however, to counteract this negative self-esteem it seems that children employ two main tactics (Hutters et al, 2013). One is to devalue their own academic competencies and the other is to adopt a less positive attitude towards school. The aloofness towards academic achievement the boys display is therefore a way to protect their self-image in face of the lower ratings of their academic competencies. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the boys then develop a limited schema of action competencies and in the absence of competencies to surpass the barrier, they abandon it. Boys have a markedly higher drop in the amount who report feeling that they 'very much appreciate going to school' throughout the school years than girls (Hutters et al, 2013). They initially rate higher than the girls on this question, so it is not a question of whether the engagement was there initially but rather what makes them dispassionate. From a dialectical perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the thesis of enjoying school then becomes faced with the antithesis of not caring about school, which synthesizes to negative feelings in relation to schooling. It should be noted that these strategies are often not sufficient to remove the negative self-perceptions they form, and that a positive self-perception in non-academic dimensions such as physical appearance, romantic appeal and athletic competence are often required (Hutters et al, 2013), which makes the issues concerning the number of boys who regard themselves as too thin, their inability to find a partner and the increasingly lower levels of males who engage in physical activities more pressing, though this final point could perhaps be mitigated by positive perception of their

ability to play computer games among other non-physical activities (Peixoto & Almeida, 2010).

In summation, the last century has seen a marked shift in academic attainment and achievement where boys have started falling behind the girls. Though there are multifaceted reasons for this, it is clear that this shift is caused by cultural factors. A possible explanation is that a culture of valuing aloofness towards academic achievement and participation can lead to a lack of academic achievement leading to lower self-esteem, which is counteracted by a lower expectation for one's academic competencies and feelings towards schooling, which seems to lead to regarding their academic career with less gravity, thereby reducing stress experienced as a consequence of academic barriers. It seems that the culture among boys of disengaging from school is a self-reinforcing one, where the already present culture is transmitted to the individual which lowers their performance so that they need to reinforce the culture further within themselves to maintain a sense of self-esteem.

BoyTalk should then seek to provide an antithesis to the boys thesis of low self-worth in academic attainment to help them synthesize a new thesis of academic competency or the value of trying to succeed. Therefore, the methods of radical acceptance and positive affirmations towards the male's abilities to perform might help counteract the lowering of self-esteem by providing a positive Other-in-me and take a small part in shifting the culture towards a more positive outlook on their ability to achieve academically and, by proxy, their negative attitudes towards school. Additionally, performing the Socratic method of raising good-faith questions surrounding the male's feelings towards schooling and their own abilities may help them to elevate their action-levels so that they may better reflect upon the barriers that culture presents them with. BoyTalk should also be mindful of these trends and prepare for the possibility that a significant part of conversations could possibly be centred around the feelings of inadequacy that may arise from performing worse than your peers and the need for supportive conversations that reinforces the male's beliefs in their own abilities and possibilities to succeed academically, perhaps also shifting the focus towards other non-academic fields where the male might feel some sense of success. It might also be useful to frame these competencies as relevant to their academic competencies so that it does not further the negative trend of disengagement from academic fields.

Loneliness

Loneliness is often defined as an incongruence between the desired amount of social relations and the actual amount (Lasgaard, 2010). However, it is important to note that what we desire is, in part, defined by what we expect we can attain. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), if the Self's actions rarely result in achieving its goals of establishing and maintaining relationships, then it can develop a schema of action competencies that may lead one to abandon the goal and wallow in their loneliness. In fact, loneliness is a facet of the human experience that is especially difficult to study because of the tendency to self-isolate and the inherent shame associated with it (Rokach, 2018). This is especially the case with adolescents and young adults (Lasgaard, 2010). Furthermore, adolescents and young adults are especially vulnerable to loneliness due to the instability of their social networks, related to changes in school, identity exploration, or physical changes that can make young people vulnerable to exclusion (Barreto et al., 2021). Adolescents are expected to conform to the peer group and have intimate friendships, but they are also expected to develop independence from friends and family, which is seen as a central developmental task of the adolescent years (Erikson, 1963). Many adolescents struggle on the path to find a balance between those opposing expectations, or theses/antitheses, which can lead to a synthesis of loneliness (Barreto et al., 2021).

There is inconclusive evidence for a difference between genders in loneliness (Lasgaard et al., 2020), possibly stemming from the fact that men have a harder time seeking help and admitting when they have difficulties (Rokach, 2018). Indeed, research has shown that men are more reluctant than females to admit feeling lonely and that men who express feelings of loneliness are more stigmatized than women who express those same feelings (Barretto et al., 2021). Furthermore, it seems that women feel more emotionally lonely, while men are more socially lonely (Rokach, 2018). Women also have a tendency to have more cohesive relationships and experience more closeness both physically and emotionally in those relationships. A possible explanation for this is that girls are socialized to develop a larger and more active social network, potentially protecting them from the social loneliness (Barreto et al., 2021). This difference in socialization could also be part of the explanation for why males report feeling less lonely than females when asked directly, because they have fewer expectations of having social relations than females do. However, even though the male might not perceive their loneliness as equally pressing compared with females, the absence of a robust network of friends indicates that they likely have a smaller internal audience of

Others, and by extension, less opportunities for personal development and change (Bento et al., 2012). From a dialectical perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), the socially lonely male becomes less exposed to new antitheses and they may fester within their own theses, which also hinders their personal development.

This inconclusiveness of prevalence is borne out in the Danish statistics as well where one study found that females in the age groups 16-29 score higher on loneliness measures, with 5% of males and 7.8% percent of females feeling lonely (Lasgaard & Friis, 2015). On the other hand, in another study, where the word loneliness was omitted, there was a higher prevalence of loneliness among males (Madsen & Lasgaard, 2014). A measure of loneliness where males score significantly higher than females is with regards to loneliness stemming from not having a significant other; with 27% of males and 41% of females having a significant other (Lasgaard, 2010). It seems that males might have a uniquely hard time establishing relationships with a significant other, so this could be one avenue of loneliness that may be relevant to focus on in marketing and the counsellor's courses (I.e., the search for a significant other and how to deal with feelings of unwantedness).

It should be noted that there is little data about loneliness among children younger than 16 in Denmark at the moment. There is one national survey that asked the question to 11-, 13- and 15-year-old boys and girls, however the question asked was "how often do you feel lonely" (Madsen et al, 2022). As stated previously, this might not be a good way to ascertain loneliness across genders as evidence suggests that direct questions into loneliness does not provide truly representative data. Because of this, there may be a lack of quality data about younger children's loneliness in Denmark. Regardless, within that survey, the girls reported "feeling lonely often or very often" at around double the rates compared with boys in those age groups (10/14/13% compared with 4/6/7%). This is a marked rise from the statistics from 2018 where 6/10/10% of girls and 2/3/5% of boys reported feeling lonely often, especially so for the boys (Rasmussen et al, 2018). It should be noted that this is in 2022, right after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns had ended, so perhaps boys were impacted by this more than the girls.

Loneliness is becoming an increasingly important issue to tackle as the amount of people that report feeling lonely has been on a steady incline since it was first recorded, especially among people in the age groups 16-29 both in Denmark and Norway (Lasgaard et al., 2020; Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021). This trend has taken a further alarming rise during the

COVID-19 pandemic and the youths who were affected by this are in large parts still in schooling (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2021). There are many negative consequences associated with feeling loneliness such as a raised blood pressure, higher cholesterol, cardiovascular disease, tiredness, chronic pain, sleep deprivation, and depression (Lasgaard & Friis, 2015). Interestingly enough, some of these (raised blood pressure, higher cholesterol and cardiovascular disease) are common health issues for men while the other is more common among women, so perhaps loneliness affects men's and women's health differently (Reckelhoff, 2001; Gupta et al., 2006; Bots et al., 2017). Finally, when the deadliness of loneliness is compared with other common risk factors such as alcohol use, cigarette smoking, physical inactivity and being overweight, it comes out as being an equal or stronger risk factor, which underscores the importance of tackling it (Lasgaard & Friis, 2015).

Though there are some minor differences between the genders in the prevalence of loneliness where women are more likely than men to report emotional loneliness, the general amount of loneliness in the target age group for both GirlTalk and BoyTalk has been in an upwards trend. It seems likely that there is a need an online-counselling service for both genders where they can open up about their loneliness, whether the service being gendered would have a relevant impact on conversations about loneliness is somewhat unknown. However, one could argue that especially lonely male users struggle with relationships with the other gender and might therefore benefit more from a gendered service in this context. This also makes sense from a DTS perspective (Bento et al, 2012), where the lonely males have fewer internalized voices from females and therefore less experience engaging in dialogue with them. From a CIAT perspective (Eckensberger, 2012), their action competency schema in talking to females might be limited, so that they have fewer actions they engage in with them, such as talking about their feelings and vulnerabilities. However, in counter to this, lonely males are more likely to have been bullied by other males, so they might be less likely to feel safe in exposing their vulnerable sides to other males. Which factor weighs more heavily should therefore be examined in a comprehensive study.

Regardless, this is likely to be an important topic to be cognisant of when establishing BoyTalk. When the counsellors engage in conversations with the male users, they should avoid using specific words such as loneliness and rather talk about the structural realities of their situation and the feelings connected with that. In other words, avoid putting it in the terms of "loneliness" to describe the user's feelings unless the user brings it up themselves. Additionally, these users may benefit especially from the positive regard and radical

acceptance approach, since their help-seeking behaviour might already be a rarity in the limitations of their self-isolation and giving a positive experience might make them continue to engage in help-seeking. Just providing these users a platform to speak to somebody might in large parts provide them the benefits of experiencing less loneliness and taking part in ending their cycle of self-isolation.

Suicide

There are on average 2-3 times as many males who commit suicide than females depending on the year (Dansk Forskningsinstitut for Selvmordsforebyggelse, n.d). However, women report suicidal ideation 2-3 times as often as men (Beautrais, 2002). On the one hand, an explanation for this gender difference is that males often chose more deadly ways to attempt suicide. On the other hand, reporting suicidal ideation increases the likelihood that the person will receive help. It should also be noted that females attempt suicide 3-4 times as often as men (Beautrais, 2002; Dansk Forskningsinstitut for Selvmordsforebyggelse, n.d). However, when only the medically serious suicide attempts are included in the statistics, the rates seem to be equal between genders (Beautrais, 2002). One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that females may intentionally use methods which are less likely to be fatal, but which give the illusion of risk, because they intend only to draw attention to their plight, and not, in fact, die. Males also have higher rates of externalizing behaviour (including antisocial and violent behaviours, substance abuse, and other behavioural issues) than females. These differences may, in part, explain the higher rate of death by suicide among men, since males prone to aggressive, antisocial and externalizing behaviours may make more impulsive, lethal, active, determined, and possibly drug-fuelled suicide attempts than their female counterparts.

To summarize, it seems that suicide is not a gendered issue as a whole, but that individual parts of it and ways to counteract it can be gendered. This tendency holds true for most broad statistical topics. Suicidal ideation and threats of suicide without direct consequences is fairly commonplace presently on GirlTalk and it would seem that it would be less likely for both to occur on BoyTalk. Because it is so commonplace, GirlTalk's standard procedure in dealing with it is that they do not take it seriously unless the person mentions using specific tools or that they are planning/performing specific actions. In the cases where they deem it to be a serious threat, they contact relevant authorities. However, threats of suicide might have to be taken more seriously in a male focused chat-service since these threats are more likely to be end with a life-threatening attempt. Finally, it has been found that

users of non-gender-specific online-counselling services present much higher levels of distress at baseline than those observed in face-to-face services, though the changes in distress from engagement with the service was lower in online-counselling (Blackshaw et al. 2023). Since male suicides tend to be more impulsive, the nature of a low-barrier-to-entry service may mean that BoyTalk could provide an invaluable opportunity to reach these males at their worst moment and hopefully take a small part in changing their impulses so that they may live another day.

Well-Being

Well-being is a very broad topic which can either be examined directly through subjects reporting on their subjective experience of well-being or examined indirectly through measures of physical and mental health (Madsen et al, 2022). One of the most comprehensive studies on this topic is Skolebørnsundersøgelsen which is a nationally representative survey that is conducted every 4 years across 50 different countries, with a sample of 4,500 children in Denmark in the age groups 11, 13 and 15 that answered a myriad of questions. Among these were questions regarding their well-being and measures of physical and mental health.

There were a few differences between the answers given by boys and girls for most of the topics that are included in Skolebørnsundersøgelsen (Madsen et al, 2022). These differences were more often than not fairly small, but for some cases they can be especially large. Girls usually reported more health-related issues than boys, this is the case for every age group, but especially for the 15-year-old students. Fewer girls than boys had a positive self-rating of their health and more girls than boys had reoccurring symptoms such as headache, stomach pain, back pain, etc., which is likely highly related to them experiencing symptoms from having periods. Most children were in a normal weight range, but more girls than boys were underweight while more boys than girls were overweight. However, ironically, there were twice as many girls than boys who perceived themselves as being too fat, and twice as many boys who reported feeling too thin, except for the youngest age range where they were about equal. This is possibly one avenue that BoyTalk could focus on (I.e., the feeling of being too thin or not muscular enough). When it comes to health-promoting behaviour, the girls generally scored higher while boys acted with less regard for their health. More boys than girls had tried cigarettes, e-cigarettes, alcohol, being drunk, smoking marijuana and finally regularly drinking sugary drinks. There were more boys who use time on physically demanding tasks, but there were also more boys than girls who spend many

hours playing video games. Regarding mental health, there were significantly more girls than boys who report feelings of low self-worth and lower levels of positive mental health, which drastically increases as they age. There were slight differences in some measures of level of enjoyment from being at school. More boys than girls felt like they had somebody to talk with, and that the teacher believed in them. Furthermore, there were more girls who felt pressured by the amount of work they had at school. Boys also stated generally that they had an easier time talking with their fathers or the opposite gender and were more physically active with friends after school. This contradicts some of the previous evidence that boys had a harder time finding a partner, however, those previous studies looked at older age-ranges so they might not be contradictory. Boys were more likely to be the bullies and victims of bullying. Girls were more likely to use more time on social media, acknowledge that their use is problematic, and were seeking to remediate that.

In conclusion, on the whole girls report more negative feelings regarding their physical and mental health. However, some possible conclusions that may arise from these statistics with BoyTalk in mind are: (1) it would seem like from the data that one should expect there to be fewer users in these age groups when compared with GirlTalk, since there are more boys who feel satisfied in their daily life and would be less likely to seek help. (2) Using terms and images associated with online gaming culture may help outreach efforts. (3) Boys are more likely to have negative health related behaviours, so promoting positive versions of these behaviours or communicating that BoyTalk is a platform which encourages conversations about these topics through the marketing may be beneficial. (4) Boys may be less reflective upon their negative behaviours, may have a harder time mentalizing around these topics and may be less willing to change.

Neurodivergence

The previous sections outlined some cultural factors that affect boys differently than girls. However, it should be noted that part of the explanation for this difference possibly comes from the increased prevalence of neurodivergent conditions such as autism and ADHD which demonstrably has a negative effect on most of these factors (Kent et al., 2011; Pihl & Harboe, 2019). Generalized intellectual disabilities has been omitted to maintain brevity, however, a deeper analysis might benefit from including these as well.

Autism

Autism is presently a neurodivergence that affects males more often than females according to current data. Most studies suggest that the ratio in prevalence may be around 4-5 boys for every one girl (4-5:1), while some estimate the ratio to be as low as 2:1 (Lai et al., 2015). It is estimated by The World Health Organization (2023) that around 1 in 100 people have an autism spectrum disorder worldwide. However, this has been found when estimating the total population which is likely to be underdiagnosed. When looking at the age group of 16-year-olds in Denmark the number rises from 1% to 2,8% (Schendel & Thorsteinsson, 2018). In 2023 there were around 1 million people in the age group 12-25 in Denmark (Danmarks Statistik, n.d.), which means that there are perhaps around 28.000 people with autism. Going with the lowest ratio estimate, that comes out as 18.500 boys and 9.500 girls with autism. It is important to note that this number includes the percentage of people who are severely autistic (35%) and do not have the capability to live by themselves or sometimes have the ability to produce language and would therefore be unlikely to seek help by themselves (Lord et al., 2018). Adjusting for this number gives us the final tally of around 12.000 boys in the age group 12-25 years with functional autism. In other words, this seems to be both a male dominated neurodivergence and a prevalent enough issue that it is worth addressing.

People with autism have general difficulties with their social skills and their behaviour can often be characterized by sustained interest in an action, activity or routine (Lord et al., 2018). Thus, when dealing with this group of males one should expect the conversations to be characterized by an unnatural conversation flow, reduced sharing of emotion, interest or affect, and difficulties with mentalizing tasks. Furthermore, people with autism are more prone to irritability and aggression, so one might expect there to be more bursts of anger and, crucially, the trigger could be fairly unexpected stemming from the abnormal communication style, which might make their conversations more complicated for the counsellor. They may also have difficulties with both unwanted changes and self-made changes, which make improvements from one session to the other likely to be more difficult for faithful users. It should be noted that a service such as BoyTalk is not necessarily intended to provide long-term help; but rather act as a low-barrier-to-entry service which can provide immediate help and provide a foot in the door for further help-seeking.

It should also be noted that there are high rates of comorbidity with ADHD, some form of anxiety and/or depression with autism (Lord et al., 2018). The autistic person's difficulties with social skills are then further compounded by these factors, which creates a situation where they are more isolated than the general population. It will also likely mean that autistic people will have more reservations in engaging in social activities that could reduce their loneliness; they develop limited schema for social action competencies that maintains their isolation (Eckensberger, 2012). Additionally, autistic people are less likely to engage in help-seeking behaviour, owing to different factors, one of which is service provider's inexperience in dealing with their specific issues (Coleman-Fountain et al, 2020), which makes it especially important for a service which caters to the general male population to have some sort of knowledge and expertise into this area. Furthermore, it is very common that autistic people have little to no long-lasting reciprocal friendships or intimate relationships (Lord et al., 2018). However, even though autistic people have difficulties with social relations, it does not mean that they do not desire them. The consequences of this are that many autistic people feel a desire for socialization that is often not met. Luckily, research surrounding the therapeutic benefits of online communication seems to indicate that autistic people can benefit from the slower conversation style with no non-verbal communication (Burke et al., 2010), which provides a promising outlook for this userbase in an online chat-service. Finally, autistic people are more likely to not finish schooling and end up in lower paid work (Pihl & Harboe, 2019). This could synthesize to a feeling of inferiority, which might make the need for an Other that provides positive reinforcement higher.

As stated previously, there is little to no evidence into a gendered chat service for males, even more so for neurodivergence. It is then simply impossible to give any predictions as to whether they would seek out these kinds of services. However, simply from the sheer number of males who have some form of autism diagnosis, one might expect there to be at least enough participants with autism to warrant taking a note of it. Additionally, their issues with finding a partner may mean that they have less experience with the other gender, and would therefore feel more able to talk with a male counsellor, though again bullying from other males might make them less comfortable with male-male dyads. In conclusion, there seems to be promising evidence for the efficacy of an online chat-service for this userbase as well as a need for it.

ADHD

ADHD is the most common neurodivergence for males when measured at the age of 18 (Dalsgaard et al., 2020). In fact, the sex distribution of ADHD was around 80% males and 20% females in a large nationwide study (Jensen & Steinhausen, 2015). Similarly to autism, because of the current diagnostic criteria of ADHD, it is likely that many females are undiagnosed, so the current estimate is likely skewed (Faraone et al., 2021). However, going from the available evidence as of today it seems like this is a neurodivergence that is more often than not affecting males.

ADHD is a neurodivergence that bring with it many negative consequences in today's society. It is well known that children diagnosed with ADHD have a variety of problems in adolescence, including greater likelihood of delinquency and substance use, specific deficits in academic settings, including difficulty with organizational skills such as completing and returning assigned work, significantly lower achievement scores in reading and math, lower grades than non-ADHD adolescents and higher rates of high-school drop-out (Kent et al., 2011). Furthermore, individuals with ADHD also have difficulties with social interactions with peers, peer rejection, social isolation, sustained attention, self-regulation, and difficulties with later occupational domains of life (De Boo & Prins, 2007). The specific conversational issues are characterized by frequent shifts in conversation topics, not listening to others, initiating conversations at inappropriate times, frequently interrupting or intruding on others, and generally "clowning around" in the classroom and other contexts. Among the diverse symptoms of ADHD, severe social incompetence and peer relationship difficulties play a prominent role in the negative effects of ADHD.

In summation, people who are diagnosed with ADHD suffer from a range of negative consequences as a result of the neurodivergence, though everybody has a unique expression of them. The expectation one could have for a gendered chat-service is that these users would have difficulties with organizing their thoughts and the social skills/action competencies necessary to convey their feelings. Additionally, they might be more prone to frequently shift the conversation topic and not take the conversation as seriously as others might do. Children with ADHD have been found to have a better response to reinforcements of positive behaviour if the reinforcement is applied immediately and explicitly. In other words, it is especially important to be consistent and explicit about positive affirmations for this userbase, however, it is uncertain whether an asynchronous chat within an online-counselling service

allows for this immediacy. The difficulties in completing and returning assigned work means that one should have an expectation that the user will have difficulties with follow up any issues brought up from one conversation to the other. Meaning that faithful users with ADHD should be expected to have less growth from conversation to conversation, though as stated previously, that might not necessarily be a primary goal for a service such as BoyTalk. There should also be an expectation that the user could perform worse on mentalizing activities, though they may still benefit from engaging in them. The poorer social skills could also impact their understanding of the counsellor's words, so it is especially important to speak more directly and with clarity with males as it is likely that the person seeking help could have ADHD. Finally, one should expect these conversations to be more erratic, less organized and more prone to aggression, and counsellors should expect these conversations to be more demanding of their patience.

There are also high rates of comorbidity in people with ADHD. Children, and especially boys, with ADHD suffer from comorbid disorders such as oppositional-defiant disorder/conduct disorder (ODD/CD; 17,2%), developmental disorders (16.1%), autism (13,3%) and intellectual disabilities (7.9%; Jensen & Steinhausen, 2015). In total, 48% of the sample had none of the investigated comorbidities, 52% had at least one comorbid disorder, and 26.2% of these had two or more disorders. This means that it is likely that a person with ADHD has one or more disorders or divergences with all the negative baggage that is associated with it. It is beyond the scope of this paper to properly examine all these comorbid variants; however, it is meant to show that the person with ADHD likely has other pressing issues that confounds and creates a further negative situation for them, which might indicate that they are more likely to be in need of the service.

One key point of interest from the most common comorbidity is that the children with ADHD and comorbid ODD/CD, tend to select more aggressive responses and are also more confident that they would be successful in performing this anticipated aggressive reaction (De Boo & Prins, 2007). In other words, they are likely candidates for becoming or being bullies through developing an aggressive action competency. These children tend to perform as well as normal controls when they have to evaluate the effectiveness of solutions for hypothetical social problems, meaning that engaging in mentalizing activities might be beneficial for these users, regardless of their difficulties in engaging with it. This also lends credence to the idea that engaging bullies in general in mentalizing activities may be a useful intervention method. These subjects performed less effectively when they had to generate their own solutions, so it

might be beneficial to take a more active role in helping them with these mentalizing activities, however, it is uncertain whether this is the case for bullies in general, which needs further exploration. In short, if the counsellor experiences that a person who has stated that they have ADHD is acting in an overly aggressive manner, they could try to engage actively in mentalizing after the conversation has cooled off or in another session.

In children with ADHD, the social difficulties do not merely result from a lack of social and problem-solving skills, but rather from a failure to perform those social skills when needed (De Boo & Prins, 2007). This performance failure may be caused by emotional deregulations and the inability to control boisterous and aggressive behaviour. This is merely speculation, but perhaps the slow nature of an asynchronous online-counselling service might be beneficial for this userbase as well, as they have more time to reflect upon their actions and messages in between as well as during the process of writing the responses. There doesn't seem to be any research into this specifically, so this could be an interesting avenue of research in the future.

There are many potential difficulties that may arise throughout the individual's lifespan, beyond the generalized difficulties which were presented previously, from having ADHD. Among 18-year-olds with ADHD, only around 55% had completed elementary schooling (ungdomsuddannelse) by the time they were 18, which is the lowest rate compared with all psychic and physical handicaps, and autism (Pihl & Harboe, 2019). In the general population the completion rate was around 80%. Using a Danish register, it was found that youths (ages 7 to 18) with ADHD were almost twice as likely to be reported as victims of sexual crimes (Christoffersen, 2022). Another study of the Danish national registries found that children with ADHD were 2.7 times more likely to be victims of violent crimes than their typically developing peers, after adjusting for confounding risk factors (Christoffersen, 2019). Furthermore, individuals with ADHD are 60% more likely to have been convicted of a crime, and 70% more likely to have been incarcerated (Ellickson, 1993). Children with ADHD also has a four times higher rates of suicide attempts and deaths (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). This risk was over tenfold in those with ADHD in addition to another psychiatric diagnosis. This could potentially be a part of the explanation for why suicide death statistics for males are so elevated, which will be a topic of its own later. Finally, indicators of adversity such as out-of-home care, low social class, paternal criminality, maternal mental disorder, and severe marital discord has been found to moderately predict the occurrence of ADHD (Østergaard et al., 2016).

All these factors confound to create a picture of a person who is likely in severe distress. Poor social life, poor academic achievement, impoverished and challenging home environments, being a victim of violent or sexual crimes, and suicidality or suicide attempts are topics that dominate the conversations from faithful users on GirlTalk's platform. One might therefore predict that there will be an overrepresentation of people with ADHD that utilizes the chat-service for the reasons stated above, especially among the faithful users. However, in one study looking into the rates of treatment seeking, the cumulative probability for people with ADHD seeking treatment was 55% (Dakwar et al., 2014). This is in stark contrast to treatment seeking for psychiatric disorders in general, which is estimated at 87% in the United States. However, this study looked at people seeking professional treatment that requires both a time and cost commitment when seeking and engaging in the service, which might be especially difficult for people with ADHD who struggle with impulsiveness. Therefore, a low-barrier-to-entry service such as BoyTalk might experience a higher inflow of users with ADHD than other higher-barrier-to-entry services. As there is lacking evidence into how to best approach conversations with these users in an online-counselling service it is especially important to continually observe and evaluate conversations so that one may gain this knowledge.

Summary

It was argued previously that males have a harder time adopting feminine traits as opposed to females adopting masculine traits in today's culture. However, the importance of this shift should not be overstated so as to give a false impression that males have more difficulties in general. Because of the negativity associated with the feminine traits and the inherent power imbalance between it and masculinity, females have a score of issues that arise from it. Regardless, it seems relevant to divert resources to treat males their own unique challenges which demand attention.

Even though men usually fare better on most measures, it should be noted again that for most everything that has been studied, males and females are far more similar than they are different. This means that even if something is an issue that affects females at higher rates, males are more often than not trailing closely behind, and vice versa. In summation, though there are some differences between males and females in most measures, they are too small to justify not having a chat-service for males. Furthermore, evidence seems to suggest that even though boys report feeling more content with their lives, the boys who do seek therapeutic

chat-services report the same amount of satisfaction from those conversations as girls did (Fukkink & Hermanns, 2009). This shows that though one may expect less users in a BoyTalk, the users it *would* get will likely have the same positive effects from the service as the users of GirlTalk.

Establishing BoyTalk

This section seeks to examine possible points of interest when establishing BoyTalk. These include: GirlTalk and BoyTalk as a cultural force, structural realities, how to structure the organization from a CIAT and DTS perspective, marketing, and further research topics. These will, more so than previous sections, be mostly based on conjecture as there is no precedent for this, and this text should again be seen as a pioneering study that can provide grounds for other more extensive studies to pull inspiration from.

GirlTalk and BoyTalk as a Cultural Force

The preceding text has elaborated extensively the culture surrounding gender norms, how they are propagated, and their effects, which is not a simple passing interest but a main thesis for this part of the paper. Therefore, this section is intended to illustrate the important position BoyTalk *and* GirlTalk has in guiding culture. They have a unique position as the leading gender-matching general online-counselling service to not only provide immediate help but also act as a cultural force of change, not only on the immediate term but also as an example for other countries, where there is likely a demand for similar services, to establish similar services. The way GirlTalk markets itself, the way conversations are being held on the platform and the in-person courses, seminars, communities, and therapy that it provides are all avenues of cultural impact. As the platform grows larger, the responsibility attached with it grows as well, which would also be the case for BoyTalk. It is then exceedingly important that both GirlTalk and a potential BoyTalk, which would be the first of its kind in Denmark and likely the world, are mindful of this responsibility. The overarching goal of these services, beyond the immediate impact it has for the individual users, should then be to reinforce positive gender norms while countering the negative ones.

A key point to question is what the presence of a service for females, but not for males, communicates. A part of the picture that has not been clearly stated yet is that the cultural norms that make males less likely to engage in help-seeking is not simply a norm or narrative that emerges from within the individual, but a larger cultural norm that the

individual adopts within their identity. In other words, many factors, large or small, help to maintain or break down this sort of narrative within society. One of these factors that might maintain it is the presence of a GirlTalk, but not a BoyTalk. Intentionally or not, having a GirlTalk but not a BoyTalk implicitly communicates that this difference in availability is present because females need it more or that males do not need it, both interpretations essentially helping to maintain the negative cultural norm that makes males less likely to seek help. In other words, the cultural impact of BoyTalk or GirlTalk cannot be seen in a vacuum, but they must be viewed as two parts of a whole where an absence of one of them leaves a hole that communicates something culturally. Though this paragraph is a modest part of this paper, it might be one of the most important points that have been brought up as to how the presence, or in this case the absence, of BoyTalk may affect the culture.

Separating the online-counselling service along the lines of gender *may* reinforce the dichotomous relationship between gender. However, though the ideal of gendered norm abolition is a good one, the reality is that gender norms are such a large and dominating part of the current culture that it is impossible to completely disregard it. As has been argued extensively, the way forward towards a world where people are treated as the person they are, rather than their gender, is by breaking down the dichotomous relationship between masculinity and femininity. However, this should be done *through* the current framework to change it from *within*. Therefore, it may be especially beneficial for a service that caters to males from a male perspective. If BoyTalk can take a small part in changing harmful gender norms, it could have a long-lasting impact that improves the service's outreach capacity through lessening the effects of the masculine stereotypes of self-reliance and stoicism.

Structural Realities of Establishing BoyTalk

As stated previously, there should be an expectation that there will be less users for BoyTalk as compared with GirlTalk. The question is whether this difference is created by an actual difference in need or a difference in help-seeking behaviour. The truth is likely somewhere in between those two options. Regardless, it seems that this difference arises in no small parts due to cultural factors rather than some inherent differences between males and females. As such, a low userbase should be expected at first but as culture shifts over time, the number of users between the gendered services will reach closer towards an equilibrium. This may, and probably will be, an exceedingly long process, such that it is better to assume that

this possible change will not bear any relevance for the implementation of BoyTalk in the foreseeable future.

Though there is little evidence into specific chat services for males, a Dutch study on their Kindertelefoon service (children-telephone; a gender-non-specific phone and chat service for children) found that 80% of their userbase were girls, 12% were boys and 8% were unknown (Fukkink & Hermanns, 2009). It is difficult to ascertain where this gender difference emerges from as the study did not try to explore this. It might be cultural factors, marketing, outreach efforts or a number of other factors that could be the cause of this difference. However, going by the available evidence both from this study, the statistics from the literature review of fewer males having participated in therapy before (Moltzau, 2023), and other factors such as boys reporting a higher general life satisfaction, etc., BoyTalk should be expected to need fewer employees to start with than GirlTalk needed because of the smaller expected userbase. To place a specific number on it, BoyTalk will likely need somewhere between 20 to 40% as many counsellors as GirlTalk needed when it was established.

A possible concern is whether there would be difficulties in finding volunteers who could fill the required positions. It seems like there is a consensus that men and women do volunteering work at similar rates, though men are overrepresented in the sports category while underrepresented in the social/health category (Boje et al., 2019). This difference amounts to 20% men and 13% of women in the sports volunteering category, and 7% of men and 9% of women in the social/health volunteering category. This slight difference of 2% (around 130% aggregate difference) is much smaller than the projected need for having just 20/40% of the required staff from GirlTalk (500/250% aggregate difference). Furthermore, GirlTalk already has a lot of volunteers who could advertise it to men that they know. As such, this challenge should be fairly easy to overcome.

How to Structure the Organization from a CIAT and DTS Perspective

As have been mentioned extensively, BoyTalk will have few reliable studies to pull from when trying to create its organization. In the absence of such studies to rely upon, it is important that the structure of BoyTalk allows for it to flexibly and dynamically meet the unknown barriers that may arise on its path towards its goals. With this goal in mind, it is likely that applying the concept of CIAT and DTS to see how one could structure the organization may be useful.

Eckensberger (2012) argues ‘‘Whereas some authors claim that consciousness is a necessary aspect of an action (which also implies the methodical possibility of asking actors about their actions), I have claimed that only the potential self-reflectivity of an agency (and a specific action) is crucial.’’ Therefore, if we can argue for the presence of self-reflective actions within an organization, then we can also argue for the application of CIAT to analyse the actions of it and later its potential cultural impact. If we look back at the basic structure of CIAT, there are actions – barriers – goals at three different levels where the secondary and third-level actions reflects upon the preceding step. In short, when we engage in secondary actions, we reflect upon the first level’s process to ascertain how we may modulate our actions, which requires an understanding of the barrier’s intentions and agency, and/or whether the goal we tried to achieve with our actions was desirable or not. This process of reflection is an action in itself, and failures at this step necessitates that there is a barrier towards that secondary goal of reflecting upon the primary action process. This barrier demands another level of reflection to resolve, in other words a third-level action that reflects upon one’s reflections.

This part is an example for how one could model an organization within the action-level framework (Eckensberger, 2012): BoyTalk might have the *goal* of reaching out to males so that they gain more users, which they try to achieve through the *action* of marketing the service, however, there has clearly been a *barrier* to their action as they only receive a few extra users. Now the organization has to engage in secondary level actions to reflect upon the issues of the first step. The administration arranges a meeting with the marketing team, and they discuss what went wrong. After some dialogue, they decide that perhaps the marketing didn’t appeal to the target group, i.e., they didn’t understand the Other’s (i.e., males) agency or intentions. They then modulate the primary action, i.e., change the message of the marketing, however, yet again the marketing only gains a few new users. They gather again to reflect upon what went wrong and through reflecting upon their previous action modulation, they realize that the secondary action modulation, i.e., discussing amongst themselves what other approaches would work, was insufficient to understand the intentions of the Other. Therefore, they perform a third-level action by changing their approach, i.e., their secondary actions, which is done by creating a questionnaire that they administer to different males on the street, and gain feedback on what made the previous marketing unsuccessful. Through this secondary action, they can then gain a better understanding of the Other’s agency and may better modulate their primary actions to reach their goals.

As we can see through this example, CIAT can be fruitfully applied to an organization and it is therefore, just like an individual, through higher action levels that it can gain flexibility and adaptability to meet the barriers that arise. The question then becomes, what factors are relevant for how to structure an organization so that it is better at engaging in higher action levels, in other words action- and agency-oriented actions? Firstly, as the example shows, making space for communicative actions among the members is crucial, since it is within the communicative space that reflections may occur. This can be done by arranging meetings about specific topics of interest, having weekly meetings about the organizations action processes, creating a culture of openness to discussion, etc. Additionally, keeping in mind a CIAT framework might enable this communicative space to become more focused on the actions, barriers, and goals of interest as well as the processes that are necessary to modulate those actions to better align with the barriers.

However, uniquely to an organization as compared with an individual, stemming from the fact that it is a collective of individuals who each can engage in individual and collective actions themselves, these processes do not necessarily have to be a exclusively collective actions where each member of the organization is included at all times, and there are different individual and collective actions that members of the organization may perform simultaneously and concurrently, which each can be modelled individually as their own action level processes. Additionally, the relevant members of each action level process may shift dynamically as there are different members who are in positions of relevance. To exemplify this, we can pull some inspiration from DTS (Bento et al, 2012). If we model the organization as the Self, then the space of the Self is the communicative spaces that the members of the organization engage in dialogue within. DTS argues that the Self fluctuates among different and even opposed I-positions that engage in a dialogical process where they address each other, and position and reposition themselves in relation to each other. Within an organization, this would be the different members who occupy various positions of relevance and are engaged in a dialogue about the action processes. Not every member will be of relevance for every situation, just like how not every I-position will be of relevance in every dialogue within the space of Self, nor with interactions with real Others (which include institutions, cultural norms, etc).

Every member will also have their own Other's-in-me who they collectively negotiate a collective understanding of, so that the organization holds collective Other's-in-me, or cultural narratives, which are influenced by the incoming signals from the real Others.

Failures in receiving or acquiring these signals therefore means that the organization will have a worse understanding of the Other, which hinders their ability to effectively influence them. An organization has a different toolbelt of affordances given to them to engage in communicative actions which include market research, outreach efforts, dialogue with experts, among other actions they may take. These communicative actions with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of the Other(s) of interest is especially important so that the organization may have a deeper impact on both individuals and culture. Through these activities, an internal audience that constrain or afford different dialogues and actions within and outside the organization is formed. It would likely be useful to position relevant Others as influential Others-in-me within the space of Self of the organization so that it can gain the appropriate affordances, as well as the constraints to its actions. It has not been mentioned previously, but constraints and affordances are just directional terms according to actions, they do not carry with them a valence. Sometimes constraint is useful where an affordance for an action would lead one to selecting an unsuccessful action to achieve one's goals. In short, it is important to form a relevant and useful internal audience through the different communicative actions that the organization may employ so that they can act appropriately.

Different members of the organization are also each positioned in a hierarchy of relevance and power, and a rigid organizational structure may hinder the process of positioning and repositioning which is a crucial part of a Self's ability to engage in internal dialogue to gain new perspectives. As we saw through the CIAT example, it is within the communicative space of questioning one's actions that reflections may occur to better modulate them. If the position of questioning the action process is limited to a few individuals, then the opportunity to gain new and relevant perspectives on an issue might be missed, in essence creating a situation where the organization limits its internal dialogical processes. This is another way to argue for the importance of creating a culture within the organization where discussions about one's action processes is an affordance given to all or most positions. In summation, it seems relevant to model the organization from a CIAT and DTS perspective to improve the organization's ability to flexibly and dynamically meet the barriers it may face, which is of especially high importance for an organization that establishes itself as an entirely new form of entity which cannot rely upon a robust and diverse field of study to draw upon the knowledge from.

Marketing

Marketing is not only a way in which BoyTalk can gain new users but also a way in which BoyTalk can affect culture. It is a key communicative action that an organization has within its toolbelt. The marketing communicates to Others *what* ‘we’ do, *who* would be interested in the service and *who* ‘we’ are. What ‘we’ do and *who* would be interested in the service is very easy to determine, however, *who* ‘we’ are needs to be determined. BoyTalk needs to create a well-defined and consistent identity so that it can communicate this in its marketing. If there is a miscommunication of the companies' values, it may risk rejecting males and create harmful cultural effects. In a CIAT framework (Eckensberger, 2012), sending mixed signals may make the Other misunderstand your intentions so that they are less likely to perceive you as a helpful tool in achieving their goals. Furthermore, first impressions matter a lot, and a negative public perception can be difficult to change (Rabin & Schrag, 1999). This may not only cost a lot of money in advertising but also reduce the immediate potential positive impact of the service. BoyTalk can adopt many of the core values of GirlTalk such as ‘everyone needs someone to talk with’, ‘you are valuable’, and having a ‘sisterhood’ (or in this case brotherhood). However, both might benefit from having a core value of being gender positive beyond just proclaiming the benefits of a community of peers in your gender group. The following paragraphs outlines a summary of the most relevant loose threads relating to marketing from the previous sections.

BoyTalk should have a large emphasis on reinforcing positive gender norms, though that doesn’t necessarily have to be an explicitly stated goal in its outwards facing marketing, rather it can be communicated implicitly through the topics it focuses on. The harmful effects of gender norms not only create more males who need the service but also makes them less likely to seek the help that they need. Because of the self-reinforcing, oppositional and oppressive nature of the masculinity/femininity dichotomy, it is important to take an active role in this change. One of the most important harmful masculine gender norms that BoyTalk should focus on is that of self-reliance, which should be modified to emotional vulnerability and help-seeking. However, it's important to frame this as an extension of the masculine role rather than an inclusion of the feminine. This avoids potential issues with reactionary opposition while allowing the males to operate within traditionally feminine gender roles that may benefit them.

It could also be relevant to have marketing aimed at some of the issues mentioned in the paper that are especially common such as difficulties with finding a partner, loneliness, suicidal ideations, having negative feelings around the size of your penis, and negative self-perceptions around weight and muscular mass. Talking about SPA or having a micropenis could be an especially relevant candidate for marketing purposes as it is a rarely talked about topic that would garner a lot of attention. It is also possibly one of the most pressing issues facing males in society; no other issue explored within this paper occurred more commonly for males. However, because of the shocking and shameful nature of the topic, it is even more so important to approach this topic with care and respect. It is especially important to avoid displaying the topic in a comedic sense as the males suffering from it already expect to experience ridicule. Additionally, if BoyTalk is too forward with this sort of marketing, it might be easily confused with a chat-service about sexual topics rather than a chat-service which is a space for open conversations about whichever topics may be important for the users. Feelings of loneliness is also likely to be an especially cogent topic to market around as it is one of the most pressing issues within society for both males and females. However, it might be relevant to stay clear from using the term loneliness to avoid creating a space where the males are less open about their feelings. This could be done by describing descriptive realities around loneliness and the feelings they may bring without using the term. Suicidal ideations is likely to be an important topic for quite a few potential users, however, this topic especially has to be approached with care as many people know of suicide hot-lines and other services that caters to suicidal people, so it might be easily mistaken for a service that caters exclusively to that. There may also be some merit in marketing BoyTalk as a platform where one may also talk about difficulties with finding a partner and the social and cultural pressures associated with it, and also how this affects consent, though consent especially is likely best served to be a topic of EmpowR- or Sisterhood-like courses and communities. Regardless of the topic that is focused upon in the marketing, it is important to emphasize clearly and concisely that BoyTalk is a space for open conversations regardless of the topic, so as not to confuse the receivers and leave the door open for anyone whose attention may have been grabbed by a topic that isn't as relevant for them.

There might also be a higher need for BoyTalk to use more active marketing to gain a userbase, because males are less likely to seek the help that they need than females. Furthermore, word-of-mouth travels slower between males than it does among females, which would further decrease its possible impact (Sun & Qu, 2011). This would presumably also

have an effect on the availability of volunteers since many of the volunteers that works for GirlTalk have brought in new volunteers themselves through word-of-mouth. As such, one might expect there to be a larger need for marketing towards hiring volunteers as well, though the presence of GirlTalk probably already provides a golden opportunity to spread the word among the counsellor's networks to hire male volunteers. In summation, the marketing is an excellent tool that an BoyTalk has to reach Others, to communicate BoyTalk's values, and to influence culture and what sort of topics may be acceptable to be talked about beyond the platform of BoyTalk.

Topics That Need Further Research

This section is an elaboration of topics that were briefly mentioned or not at all that could be valuable to examine in the future.

It is important to determine if BoyTalk should give more explicit advice to their users because of the expectation of them having poorer social skills. It seems like there is conflicting evidence and, as usual, little evidence into how this is mediated by the medium they communicate through. It could be prohibitively risky to provide more explicit advice to the users and it may run the risk of creating an environment where individual volunteers present completely different or conflicting advice so that the service becomes too heterogeneous. Additionally, explicit advice may hinder the method of Socratic questioning, which based upon the evidence gathered and theories applied in this paper seems like a good method to employ. Therefore, as stated previously, it is likely that the best action is to employ the same methods for how a conversation is conducted from GirlTalk, however, it bears further examination.

It has been touched upon during different topics, but males tend to use drugs at higher rates than females and one should expect there to be more conversations at BoyTalk about this topic for this reason. The reason why this topic was avoided was that GirlTalk does not currently have any guidelines for conversations about drug use. The only stance internally is from point 1.6.4 in the "lovgivning" section of the internal handbook for volunteers "Håndbog Frivillige Rådgivere" that states that your counselling will be in accordance with Danish laws. E.g., that you do not encourage use of hash or other drugs ("Din rådgivning skal være i overensstemmelse med dansk lovgivning. Dvs. at du f.eks. ikke opfordrer til brug af hash eller andre stoffer,"). However, this does not imply that the counsellors can't have conversations about users' drug use or abuse, but simply that they can't encourage it. Because

of the higher prevalence of drug use among males, there should probably be space in BoyTalk for these conversations. There is therefore a need to formulate a guideline for how the volunteers should approach these conversations without overstepping the bounds of Danish law.

One question that the author could not find any available evidence for is: Are there any gender differences in expressing your sexuality in Denmark? These feelings of sexuality are often explored on GirlTalk, so it seems likely that this will be the case for BoyTalk as well. There may be some differences in how these difficulties express themselves based on gender with regards to the person's self-perception and the reactions they get from their environment, however, the question remains whether that is a meaningful difference that should be accounted for.

Another question that was difficult to research was that of: How would male volunteers perform in a male only online-counselling service? It would seem that there are no similar cases to draw any information from, so this is an aspect of BoyTalk that should be closely observed. It seems logically evident that the people who would seek to volunteer are probably fairly similar across genders, as the position self-selects for people who want to help others and would volunteer their own time to do it. However, it could be relevant to clearly establish whether this is the case or not. The question remains whether the userbase will be significantly different and whether that requires any meaningful changes in procedures from GirlTalk. There are some slight differences that merits thought, but whether this will be borne out in the actual service remains to be seen. In this regard, establishing BoyTalk could be very valuable as a pioneering service that could be studied so that others could learn from and model it internationally.

Another question that was unable to be answered is the difference in investment for gendered services. GirlTalk relies on getting investments from charitable organisations and the government to keep the operations running, so it could be relevant to investigate closer whether there would be any difficulties in acquiring funds for a service centred around males. Perhaps stressing the cultural importance of the service and the research potential inherent within it could prove a desirable opportunity for charitable investors.

Conclusion

This paper's intent was to examine whether there is a need for a gendered online-counselling service that caters to males and if there were any important considerations if it was to be established, especially with the background that GirlTalk already exists in mind. While there are some differences between males and females, the vast majority of research have found that they are far more similar than they are different. This similarity extends to the need for a gendered online-counselling service. However, there are important avenues where males and females do differ such as males being overrepresented in violent and sexual crime statistics, bullying and bully victimhood, failure to find a partner, successful suicide attempts, drug use and abuse, social loneliness, and neurodivergence. Furthermore, they have lower social skills, help-seeking behaviour, academic attainment, but paradoxically higher subjective experience of well-being. Whether these differences will require any meaningful change in how conversations are conducted is still somewhat unclear, however, it seems likely that it could be relevant to keep in mind. What *does* seem clear is that these differences largely arise from cultural differences between genders rather than biological differences. Furthermore, males being in the dominant position of the feminine-masculine dichotomy leads to them occupying a victimizer role which makes them the originators of many of the pressing issues facing modern society and cultural changes that can affect this tendency has an inherent high value as a preventative measure for both genders and society as a whole.

There are many things to consider when establishing BoyTalk, however, as GirlTalk already has the expertise required from establishing an essentially identical company, most of the organisational issues should be fairly easily resolved. Furthermore, it seems likely that BoyTalk can adopt most, if not all, the procedures regarding how conversations are conducted with some special considerations for specific topics. Therefore, there will likely not be any major issues structurally when establishing BoyTalk. One special consideration is that one should expect there to be significantly less users as males are less likely to seek help and perhaps slightly less likely to need help. Furthermore, another especially important aspect that is different to GirlTalk is the potential cultural impact of the service and how to best proceed towards a positive impact. There are no other organisations in Denmark let alone the world, as far as the author could find in a previous literature review, that provides a gender-matching generalized online-counselling service for males. This presents a very unique opportunity for BoyTalk to become a cultural tour de force that could set the tone of cultural discourse in this

arena on both a national and international level, just like GirlTalk. This role should not be taken lightly, and it is of utmost importance that BoyTalk has a clear goal and identity that it establishes early to present to the world that aligns with these needs that have been explored. It also has to be mindful of the barriers that it may face towards that goal as well as the necessary processes it should engage in when their actions do not manage to achieve their goals.

To best approach this role, it is first relevant to examine the cultural forces that one needs to face, in other words to understand the Other that one tries to influence through one's actions. One of these that demand consideration is that of the oppressive relationship between the cultural narratives of masculinity and femininity. The masculine is traditionally seen as representing someone who is physically strong, confident, assertive, self-reliant, emotionally stable/stoic, unempathetic, and has a high social status through wealth or social power, while the feminine embody the opposite role, being represented as weak, diffident, agreeable, dependent, emotionally vulnerable, empathetic, subservient. This creates an oppressor and oppressed relationship between the genders. An important baseline mechanic that maintains the gender norms is that of ingroup/outgroup dynamics. A person is not only trying to associate themselves with their own assigned gender roles, but to disassociate with the other side of the dichotomy, in an effort to position themselves with the Other-in-me of gender norms that occupies a highly influential position within the space of Self and the world around them. However, the feminist movement have taken great strides in expanding the traditional feminine gender roles to include positive masculine traits but this movement has ultimately met a lot of resistance from the male side which has had a harder time adopting traditionally feminine traits. This is a natural reaction as the dissolution of gender norms is an attack on the very concept of domination inherent in the relationship between genders. Therefore, it may be that the best way to communicate this message of changing gender norms is by incorporating the feminine roles into the masculine ones through expansions rather than inclusion. In other words, the wording used in marketing, on the website, and dialogue with Others through the different avenues that the platform has should avoid evoking the idea of inclusions of feminine traits but rather evoke the idea of these traits inherently being masculine without mentioning the feminine.

Though it is likely practically impossible in the short and medium term, the ultimate goal of BoyTalk and GirlTalk should be the dissolution of harmful and restrictive gender norms. These cultural narratives and schema impact society in significant ways, creates a

significant portion of the issues we see today and makes it more difficult for BoyTalk to reach their intended audience. Although it might seem insurmountable to change culture in such a radical way, great cultural shifts happen one step at a time, one of which could be BoyTalk.

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