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“It’ll pass”: *NYPD: Blue*’s Sipowicz and Mundane Masculinity

Marc Ouellette

The development of the character of Det. Andy Sipowicz, on the ABC drama, *NYPD: Blue*, effectively demonstrates that the obstinance of traditional forms of masculinity may ultimately be a key factor in their undoing. Rather than effecting a superficial change based on consumer choice, as concurrent characters do, Sipowicz undergoes a transformation of his social behavior. Sipowicz regularly behaves in a manner consistent with Robert Connell’s definition of “hegemonic masculinity”: he resorts to violence, he resists change and he resents women and minorities (131). His alcoholism and quick temper tend to hinder his ability to adapt. However, change has occurred around him in the form of gay coworkers, minority bosses and even a spouse who was better educated, earned more and held a more esteemed position than he did. In every instance, Sipowicz’ stubborn adherence to the patriarchal dictums to “get over it” or to “deal with it” results in his eventual conversion from hegemonic masculinity to a more tolerant masculine formation.¹ That *NYPD: Blue* belongs to the basic genre of the “cop drama” makes Sipowicz’ negotiation of masculine behaviors more extraordinary since this genre traditionally relies on hypermasculine modes, often to the exclusion and even detriment of women and minorities.²

Given the choice of either adapting to change or losing his place on the police force — that is, his place within the hierarchy of (hegemonic) masculinities — Sipowicz will always adapt. Although nominally a working-class figure, Sipowicz fulfills the role of the traditional (American) hero who overcomes adversity through perseverance, self-reliance and hard work. As the show’s primary character, Sipowicz has frequently endured trauma: he has been severely wounded, two of his four partners have died, his elder son and his second wife were murdered, and his infant son suffered a potentially life-threatening illness. Although he reacts violently and returns to drinking, Sipowicz eventually rights himself. When external forces disturb Sipowicz’ schema, this (masculine) resiliency reforms his psyche rather than forcing him to accept diversity.

Sipowicz has reformed to such an extent that he bristles at Det. Gibson’s sexism and resents those who pick on “hard working immigrants.” Moreover, John Irvin, the squad’s PAA, or administrative assistant, previously nicknamed “Gay John,” has twice defended Sipowicz against charges of homophobia and now babysits Sipowicz’ son. Thus, my paper will situate Sipowicz’ representation of masculinity — which I have termed “mundane masculinity” — among existing hierarchies, and examine how Sipowicz has negotiated such a change and consider the ramifications of it.³ As I will explain further, mundane masculinity comprises the everyday practices of men who belong to neither a marginalized nor a dominant masculine formation although their tendency might be to behave in a manner consistent with hegemonic masculinity, or the preferred formation in a given social setting. In other words, in keeping with the definition of hegemonic masculinity as site specific, those occupying the mundane position essentially “know their role” in the masculine hierarchy. The key distinction is that mundane masculinity does not discriminate against women, weak men, or minorities in order to sustain itself. It need not, in part because of its acknowledgment of the hierarchy and its own contingent location in it. Sipowicz’ working class example provides a potentially powerful method of reshaping

the normalized structures and quotidian practices of hegemonic masculinities. The terrain of the everyday needs to be critically explored, for, as Elaine Rapping notes in a study of daytime dramas, “as feminist social theorists in so many disciplines have continued to demonstrate, it is the exclusion of values of the private, domestic sphere from issues of justice and equality that must be addressed and corrected” (63). Moreover, the groups on the Christian right — groups like the Promise Keepers—increasingly claim this ground for themselves.

Now you’re a man: Multiple Masculinities

Considering the multiple depictions of masculinities on *NYPD: Blue*, and specifically, the masculinity represented by Sipowicz, poses a serious challenge, for, as Connell explains, “Arguments that masculinity should change often come to grief, not on counter-arguments against reform, but on the belief that men *cannot* change, so it is futile or even dangerous to try. Mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity beneath the ebb and flow of daily life” (45). So if men cannot change and mass culture assumes there is still a “fixed, true” masculinity, then how does mass culture reconcile the fact that the marketplace for masculinity has changed? The reasons for changes in masculinity are many and complex, but Connell suggests three are central within the white European or North American tradition: “challenges to the gender order by women, the logic of the gendered accumulation process in industrial capitalism, and the power relations of empire” (191). All three are relevant to the current study.⁴ In this regard, Connell concludes that masculinities are not only shaped by the processes of the dominant culture, “they are active in that process, and help to shape it. Popular culture tells us this without prompting” (185). As a contribution to the process Connell describes, this paper considers a popular cultural “text” from the last twelve years—especially seasons seven through eleven—in which the processes that shape masculinity are the very tenets of hegemonic masculinity. I mention this because the pace of change is not always rapid while at the same time the tendency is to take the present as immanent and self-evident.

Examining how the problem of reshaping masculinity is negotiated in mass or popular culture then becomes the task at hand. Moreover, examining men as being anything but in control and thinking of masculinities as meaning, or deriving, from something other than control is a recent shift. This is true not just for academics, but is hard for men to conceive themselves. Masculinity is generally taken for granted as something emanating from within rather than resulting from gender processes. Failing to interrogate masculinities – as opposed to critiquing patriarchy – allows the myths of masculinity to persist. The distinction is an important one when considering the potential for the behaviors of hegemonic masculinity as contributing factors in reconfiguring masculinity. Although the mythologies surrounding “what it means to be a man” are various and many, Michael Kimmel offers an excellent summary of the main myths of North American manhood:

(1) No Sissy stuff: Men can never do anything that even remotely suggests femininity. Manhood is a relentless repudiation of the feminine; (2) Be a Big Wheel: manhood is measured by power, wealth and success. Whoever has the most toys when he dies, wins; (3) Be a Sturdy Oak: manhood depends on emotional reserve. Dependability in a crisis requires that men not reveal their feelings; and (4) Give ’em Hell; exude an aura of manly daring and aggression. Go for it. Take risks (498).

While some might argue that the qualities Kimmel attributes to the essential North American man are redeeming — strength, power, reliability, fearlessness — they can have truly ugly converses — misogyny, greed, indifference, arrogance. Our hero possesses both sets of traits.

In the former regard, Sipowicz' exploits as a detective are exemplary. His reputation for being "first through the door" whenever the squad enters a suspect dwelling stands as substantive evidence. Such men are recognized by their colleagues as the bravest, strongest and most dependable law enforcers. Their masculine status not only goes unquestioned, it serves as a model for the others. Unfortunately, Sipowicz' reputation also includes the many bouts with alcoholism, trips to prostitutes, and a litany of racist and sexist incidents – all while he was supposedly "on the job." Sipowicz, then, embodies both extremes of hegemonic masculine behaviors but clearly the former set are instrumental in his eventual reformation for they provide the basis for the acceptance of change – with a "stiff upper lip." Moreover, his masculine status means that his eventual allegiances with gay, African-American and female coworkers carry significant weight among his colleagues.

While *NYPD: Blue* draws heavily from police stories "pulled from the headlines" and from the experiences of show contributor Bill Clark, a former New York detective, one must consider whether media merely mirror social conditions and the extent to which television influences public perception. This is especially important when examining potential processes for actual social change analogous to that which affects Sipowicz. In this regard, Seth Cagin and Philip Dray summarize the dynamic involved in viewing typical Hollywood fare:

Whatever the precise chemistry involved, when the movies are reassigned to a new position in the hierarchy of popular culture they must re-establish a rapport with their audience, to justify their existence; for when they no longer have something to offer a *popular* audience, the movies as we know them will cease to exist. [. . .] Hollywood [productions] can only be manufactured in a spirit of confidence that the filmmakers know what audiences want to see (xii).

To be sure, Cagin and Dray express a demand-side view of the economics of filmmaking, one that is entirely applicable to television. Indeed, Michael Porter, *et al*, adopt *NYPD: Blue* as an exemplar in their definition of television narrative. They begin, "On a daily basis, television viewers are presented with stories of heroes and villains [. . .] While viewers delight in the vicarious experiences of television's narratives, television's programs influence viewers by presenting values that advance the dominant ideology" (23). In this view, genre productions supply the audience with what it wants to see. Concurrent social and political trends can also provide insight into what audiences want—or at least want to imagine.

In other words, incorporating change is an inherent feature of a reality-based drama. For example, *NYPD: Blue* and its counterparts, the various *Law & Order* productions, tend to adapt actual crime stories to fit the format of the show.⁵ Since both series are set in New York, the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, for example, have figured in the shows, as have the usual set of reality based incidents. As Porter, *et al*, find, *NYPD: Blue* accomplishes this through two narrative techniques (27). In a variation of the serial format, each episode of *NYPD: Blue* depicts a two-day cycle that revolves around the outstanding investigation. Since he is the senior detective, Sipowicz – based on both "real life" and narrative conventions – almost always accepts the most challenging or most sensational case. This ensures his prominence in each episode. However, the story lasts only until the end of the episode. Character development occurs through "satellite scenes" which contribute to the "narrative arc" of each season (Porter 27-8). The satellite scenes allow the show's producers to connect the otherwise self-contained episodes and draw particular stories over the course of an entire season. According to Philip Lane, the structure of contemporary police dramas like *NYPD: Blue* allows for "changing character relationships and growth over a long period of time. Characters died or suffered loss; some improved [but] some deteriorated mentally, physically, and morally. Some began to question their own identity and

their place in life and to examine their relationships with others” (139).⁶ In contrast to earlier cop shows, such as *Dragnet* and *Adam-12*, in the contemporary shows “There is always this conflict or tension between acting as a ‘moral’ individual and as part of a team which does not completely share your view of the world” (Lane 141). Thus, negotiating his place among the constituents of the squad while remaining singularly committed to solving each case is an implicit part of Sipowicz’ daily routine. As an existing component of his masculinity, his profession and the generic formation, the requirement to “deal with it” – i.e., be the sturdy oak – prepares Sipowicz for adapting his masculinity when change occurs around him.

As mentioned earlier, not all of Sipowicz’ (masculine) behaviors can be considered positive(ly). While he is relentless, loyal, determined, wise and street-smart – among other qualities – even these traits can have negative manifestations, outcomes and consequences. Any study of such a complex character – one drawn over a period spanning more than 200 episodes – must be mindful of one of Connell’s provisos:

culinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition. This holds regardless of the changing content of the demarcation in different societies and periods of history. Masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity-in-relation [. . .] To put the point in another and perhaps clearer way, it is *gender relations* that constitute a coherent object of knowledge for science. Knowledge of masculinity arises within the project of knowing gender relations (44).

This is not to restate a binary opposition model of gender relations but to emphasize that nothing is fixed. Rather gender relations — among men, among women, between men and women — provide greater insight into masculinities. This work will confine itself, for the most part, to relations among men and masculinities while remaining watchful for effects on women and minorities.⁷

Since the traditional binary opposition model of gender tends to obscure power relations within genders, Connell employs the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” rather than the loose term “patriarchy.” The key distinction arises because hegemonic masculinity “embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy. When conditions for the defence of patriarchy change, the basis for the dominance of a particular masculinity is eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct a new hegemony. The dominance of *any* group of men may be challenged by women. Hegemony, then, is a historically mobile relation” (77). More important, Connell’s approach is neither ahistorical nor universal. That is to say that it allows for change. Thus, hegemonic masculinity

is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable. [. . .] Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 76-7).

Although he allows that the dominant position is a matter of context, Connell depicts the gender order in terms of male and female, with women always in the subordinate role. This means that his taxonomy of the gender order does not fully account for subordinated men. In this regard, Connell admits, “Though the term is not ideal, I cannot improve on ‘marginalization’ to refer to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups. Marginalization is always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the

dominant group. [. . .] The relation of marginalization and authorization may also exist between subordinated masculinities” (80-1). This is not to find fault with Connell but to show the lack of critical attention paid to “marginalized” or even “subordinated” masculinities. The pronounced academic tendency has been to critique hegemonic masculinities thoroughly – and with good reason – but the other categories remain loosely defined, if studied at all. Indeed, the men for whom “marginalized” aptly applies are at the very bottom of the gender hierarchy because they are considered traitors, failures, or both. Moreover, the leap from hegemonic masculinity to marginalized masculinity is more than rhetorical. It tends to obscure masculinities which occupy intermediate positions in the gender hierarchy and which might also be developing alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Sipowicz’ working class status (and as a former draftee without a college education) places him in such a location. His frequent brushes with superiors serve as a reminder that he does not always occupy the highest rank, thus reinforcing his loyalty to those in similar situations.

“Something like that”: Sipowicz and Mundane Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity, then, should be understood not as a male role but as a particular version of masculinity which has been socially constructed as the preferred formation. As a result, special status, or prestige, is attached to the males who best represent or conform to the “ideal” type. Frequently, males acquire prestige through mastery and conquest. Thus, hegemonic masculinity immediately serves as a basis for social control. Further, it also serves as a basis for self-subjection through the incumbent fear of (being seen) departing from the hegemonic standards. The consequence of self-regulating behavior is complicity. Hegemonic masculinity, then, also needs to be considered as (part of) a process of constant negotiation. Noted sociologist William Goode explains the dynamics of the process: “To perform and be ranked at the highest levels [. . .] demands both talent and dedication which only a few can muster. Such ‘heroes’ are given more prestige or admiration because both the level and type of performance are rare and evaluated within the relevant group. Most admirers recognize that such performances are possible only for a few” (67). Goode refers both to skills and to talent. Based on his fearlessness and dependability, Sipowicz functions as a version of the prestige male within the detective squad; that is, he derives prestige from his exceptional detective work. When any of the other detectives are working a difficult case, he or she invariably consults Sipowicz before proceeding. This occurs whether or not the squad’s commanding officer is present and is more pronounced when the lieutenant has been absent (and in the brief time they had a female commander).

Despite his frequent differences with Sipowicz, newly promoted Capt. Fancy paid him the highest compliment a detective can receive when briefing his incoming replacement, Lt. Rodriguez. The new squad leader asked specifically about Sipowicz since the detective’s reputation – both for excellent work and for abrasive behavior – is well known. Fancy simply replied, “If it’s someone you love, [Sipowicz] is the one you want to catch the case” (“Flight of Fancy”). Moreover, Sipowicz’ prestige status extends beyond “the job.” Colleagues, both male and female, regularly consult him for advice regarding their personal lives. This has been especially true of Sorensen and Clark, Sipowicz’ younger partners. While such a relationship might be expected in what is clearly meant to be a mentor-novice relationship, the late Bobby Simone, a much more independent and experienced detective frequently sought the counsel of his partner. Interestingly, female detectives Diane Russell and Connie McDowell similarly seek Sipowicz’ support in their personal dealings. Sipowicz is Russell’s Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, a position of great trust and responsibility that he takes very seriously. Russell went to Sipowicz when she began a relationship with Sorensen, her first since the death of her husband,

Simone. Later, when Russell was diagnosed with breast cancer, she confided in Sipowicz rather than any of the female co-workers. Only after Sipowicz insists does Russell confide in a female colleague, McDowell, who is willing to lend support (“It’s to Die For”). At Sipowicz’ urging, McDowell accompanies Russell to the hospital.

The eventual coupling of McDowell and Sipowicz, though seemingly unlikely, roughly repeats the romance between Andy and the late former Assistant District Attorney, Sylvia Costas. The earlier relationship played a significant part in the reconstruction of the detective from a hegemonic male to a more tolerant version. Sylvia was a “no-nonsense” prosecutor whom Sipowicz once called a “pissy little bitch” following one disagreement (“Tempest in a C-Cup”). Perhaps satisfying the myth that opposites attract, Andy and Sylvia began dating, married and produced a son, Theo, before she was murdered. Though space does not permit a full catalogue, one of the interesting ways in which Sylvia instigated Andy’s change was not through overt gender politics. Instead, she went about her business – putting bad guys away – which was the same as Andy’s. Rather than finding fault with difference, she developed dialogue through commonality. This is not to say that the woman must cater to the man or adopt (hegemonic) masculine behaviors. Rather, Sylvia effectively redeployed Andy’s existing hegemonic behaviors. When Andy started drinking following Andy Jr.’s death, Sylvia threw him out of their home until he was sober and had apologized. After seeing Andy and another detective make a hand gesture which was a cop signal for a derogatory reference to African-Americans, Sylvia flatly told her husband that he was never to bring that into their home and never to do that in front of their child (“Dead Man Talking”). In other words, he needs to change and the terms of his reform will not be negotiated. Moreover, Sipowicz needs to be an acceptable role model for his son, Theo. Given no other alternative, Sipowicz’ will “get over it” according to the tenets of masculinity.

It is ultimately in terms of his sensitivity to race and ethnicity that Sipowicz has changed most dramatically. In this regard, Andy’s working class consciousness occasionally appears, and conflicts with his otherwise hegemonic masculine performance. Furthermore, his contact with people outside the squad force him to accommodate the differences of others in order to accomplish the goal of apprehending wrongdoers. Though not succinctly stated, the sense given is that Sipowicz feels his Polish immigrant ancestors were never given the benefits of affirmative action and other programs. Sipowicz’s occasional references to his experience in Vietnam contribute to his feeling that he has been “hard done by” but that he has endured. This manifests itself in two distinct ways. Despite occasional stumbles, he is actually a staunch supporter of recent additions to the American melting pot. In this regard, Sipowicz angrily pursued a man who attacked South Korean variety store owners and expressed particular outrage at a person who would victimize “hard working immigrants” (“Dead Meat in New Deli”). More tellingly, he comforted a young Arab-American whose family business was fire-bombed in imagined retaliation for the terrorist attacks on New York (“Baby Love”). The young man wondered what he and his family should do. Sipowicz reminded him that it was not always easy to be of German or Japanese descent, either; “It’ll pass,” said the detective. This is no mere platitude. Sipowicz does not promise a happy ending, but rather one that they can live with, provided they persevere unflinchingly. This is Sipowicz’ ultimate lesson, but it is one that has its roots in the dictums of hegemonic masculinity. In Sipowicz’ thinking, victimizing the already marginalized – children, women, immigrants – is one of the worst crimes. Since Sipowicz’ sides with the law (of the father) his allegiance is ensured. Thus, hegemonic masculinity and progressive politics paradoxically intersect.

Earlier in the day, Sipowicz wondered if Arabs should have separate hospitals. Det. Jones reminded Sipowicz of the larger implications of such a sentiment, which leads to the

second manifestation of Sipowicz' change in behavior: his relationship with African-American and Latino colleagues. To summarize the situation, Sipowicz learned to respect his colleagues, especially his superiors, Fancy and Rodriguez. Andy has defended both lieutenants from unjust accusations. Upon Fancy's replacement by Rodriguez, the former told the incoming boss that if anyone in his family were hurt Sipowicz is the one he wants leading the investigation. Thus, Sipowicz' status as a kind of prestige male is confirmed, even by his superiors. This role plays out in an episode called "Fools Russian," in which an African-American gardener is set up for murder by the wife of a man with alleged Russian mob ties. The Russian woman gave Det. Jones a racially charged brush off when she first arrived at the precinct to give a statement. Jones eventually comes to suspect the wife since he doubts that the woman has been sincere in her dealings with the gardener. However, ADA Heywood, also an African-American, feels putting a black man on trial will be an easier sell. With the lieutenant otherwise occupied Sipowicz assumes the role of the top male. Interestingly, he supports Jones' suspicions and goes against the ADA's wishes. Jones' conclusions are borne out when the detectives find the inconsistencies in the woman's story. Ultimately, the Russian woman lashes out at Jones: "In America, monkeys go with monkeys." Thus, Jones' race-based suspicions were proved correct. This is significant because Jones came to the squad from the "race squad." In the xenophobic view of older cops like Sipowicz, this unit goes out of its way to find racial motives for crimes and in so doing gets in the way of "real" detective work. Not surprisingly, Jones and Sipowicz had a cool relationship prior to this incident. While I am inherently suspicious of the "white man shall lead them" narrative – which typically patronizes women and minorities as helpless and assumes the moral superiority of whites – as the key to social change, nobody else was in the position to effect change. Moreover, the way it plays out, Sipowicz acts out of responsibility, not out of largesse. In so doing, he takes a significant risk by alienating superiors. Furthermore, finding the guilty party – masculine, goal-oriented behavior – contributes to Sipowicz siding with Jones.

Several features of the man undercut the stability of Sipowicz' status as prestige male. He is aging, overweight, unattractive, balding, not particularly articulate, and his collection of "short-sleeve dress shirts" serve as a constant reminder of his working class position. Masculinity, though still something to be performed, is increasingly something to be seen, to be looked at, which makes it not so much an active as a passive existence. Here, Sipowicz differs from the obvious, external changes to masculinity as represented by the so-called "New Man" and its contemporary counterpart, "metrosexuals." *The Economist* defines the latter as "straight urban men who enjoy such things as shopping and using beauty products" (5 July 2003). In contrast, Sipowicz sticks to the uniform of the police detective: polyester sports jackets over short-sleeve dress shirts with boring ties. He spritzes occasionally with after-shave and has not altered his haircut since the show started. When necessary, John Irvin trims what is left of Sipowicz' hair with the squad's locker room doubling as a barber shop.⁹

While the metrosexual receives attention – the ultimate aim of any practitioner – from popular and academic commentators seeking the next trend, it is more of a consumption pattern than a gender orientation.⁸ The other primary goal of metrosexuals, being just "gay enough to get the babes," as *The Economist* reports, is also very much in keeping with the aims of hegemonic masculinity. It is simply a version of dominance; that is, a masculine competition with women as the prize. This is nothing new. That Sipowicz eschews appearance as a sign of masculine prowess reinforces his difference from his two most recent partners, Danny Sorenson (seasons six through eight) and John Clark, Jr. (seasons nine through twelve), who are both roughly the same age as Sipowicz' older son, Andy Jr. Clark, especially, serves as a reminder of Andy, Jr., who was killed while still a police cadet. Not only did the younger Clark follow his father "on the job," the two

have a strained relationship caused mainly by the father's whoring, drinking, ill temper and refusal to change. Clark, Sr.'s long-standing contempt for Sipowicz' identical behaviors exacerbates the situation. Sipowicz attempts to reconcile the Clarks and admits his own culpability in the dispute. Clearly Sipowicz and the elder Clark represent not just fathers but also a generation of men who perhaps did not learn from their fathers' frequent, masculine silence. Passing on his knowledge and wisdom to Sorenson, Clark and Theo ensures the reproduction of masculinity; in this case, a reformed masculinity. In fact, some of Sipowicz' best moments occur when he explains adult situations – police work and relationships – to Theo. Thus, mundane masculinity becomes reproducible and not just something that is forced upon the individual. Of course, reproducing itself in its own image is another of the mechanisms and privileges of hegemonic masculinity. In this way, reproduction is another of the facets implicit in the reshaping of masculinity.

Most interesting of the relationships Sipowicz has developed is with John Irvin, the squad's administrative assistant, or PAA. Previously, John was known to the squad as "Upstairs John," to distinguish him from Det. John Kelly when the former was stationed in Anti-Crime, on the floor above. After joining the squad, the nickname changed to "Gay John." Initially, all of the male detectives expressed a degree of homophobia, with Sipowicz, as expected, expressing the most. As Easthope suggests, "The *Masculine Myth* argues that at present masculinity is defined in the way an individual deals with his femininity and his desire for other men. [. . .] From the versions of masculinity examined here it seems that men are really more concerned about other men than about women at all" (6). Tim Beneke sees homophobia in the very same terms. In his view, "the fear of being raped by other men is an objective danger implicit in the very existence of gays [. . .] Arguably (sic) we should distinguish homophobia in straight men that focuses on the fear of being raped by strong macho gays [. . .] Straight men realize how hostile their own lust for women can be and fear being on the receiving end of that lust from men" (146). I think this is an oversimplification in theoretical terms, but in terms that an average (homophobic) male could understand, it is probably a reasonable generalization. This was never more apparent than during Sipowicz' bout of prostate – or as he says it, "prostrate" – difficulties ("Prostrate Before the Law"). John attempted to correct the detective's pronunciation, but to no avail. Yet Sipowicz endured the two perceived threats to his masculinity: first, a gay man working so closely with him, and knowing of the second threat, the loss of phallic functioning.¹⁰ As with his encounters with powerful women and minorities, Sipowicz had two choices: leave the precinct or get used to having "Gay John" in the squad room. The obstinacy of the "sturdy oak" dictum ensures that Sipowicz will eventually alter his pattern and work with John. In this regard, John has assisted with investigations because of his familiarity with "gay culture."

However, it has been on a more human level that the relationship has developed. John began babysitting Theo Sipowicz in "Writing Wrong," in 2001. To his credit, John brought a big metal toy truck for Theo. The elder Sipowicz was surprised to see John with the truck and that he knew how to play. Yet, it resonated with the detective that John had been a little boy once. Rather than focusing on difference, Sipowicz found further familiarity in John's relationship with his father. After coming out to his family, John was disowned by his father. While the deathbed reconciliation is (something of) a cliché, that which transpired between John and his father is noteworthy for Sipowicz' intervention ("A Little Dad'll Do Ya"). In this case Andy related to the father but felt for the son. Andy's alcoholism and brutality led to his estrangement from his elder son, Andy Jr. With Sylvia's help, the relationship was slowly rebuilding. Sadly, Andy Jr. was killed almost as soon as he re-acquainted himself with his father. This knowledge informed Andy Sr.'s advice to John Irvin. Despite his father's obstinate refusal to accept John's "lifestyle," John went to see his dying father in the hospital. Sipowicz told him that fathers always love their children.

The relationship between Sipowicz and John Irvin has developed to the point that the men stand up for each other when required. Although it might be expected for Sipowicz to defend John, the reverse might not. In the first case, when a hostile suspect mocked John as “sweetheart,” Sipowicz can be expected to respond as he did: “Who you calling sweetheart. You want to call me sweetheart?” Yet, John has returned the favor when gay men have accused the detectives of homophobia. The most notable instance centered on a closeted man who left his daughter with strangers so he could have anonymous sex in a park restroom (“Meet Me in the Park.”)¹¹ The daughter was kidnapped and sold to a child pornographer. The father carefully omitted his trip to the restroom in his statements to the police which complicated the investigation. When all was revealed and the man accused the detectives of homophobia, John Irvin flatly told the man that the repeated denials, especially about his homosexuality, only put his daughter in more danger. Moreover, he should thank the detectives. The scene ends with the chastened man, storming out and with Sipowicz giving John an approving nod.

“We got our man”: Conclusions

Sipowicz’ transition to a more tolerant masculinity is problematized in at least four separate ways. First, his status as a version of the prestige male could simply reinscribe the “white man shall lead them” model of social relations. However, this status is entirely relational and constantly under negotiation; context creates meaning. Thus, the second source of anxiety arises from the instability of Sipowicz’ masculinity and the fact that the canonical critical categories cannot accurately account for it. For example, Connell’s categories, “protest masculinity” (110), “alternative masculinity” (219), “renunciatory masculinity” (131) and “reformed masculinity” are as inadequate as hegemonic masculinity. Connell himself admits that this taxonomy – which refers to working class ethnic minorities, gays, self-flagellating male apologists and males who convert to the feminist cause, respectively – does not offer either a successful mass politics or a politics of the body, both of which are necessary to encompass a character such as Sipowicz. To this end, I include Sipowicz in a new formation, which I call “mundane masculinity;” the most quotidian of masculinities, yet one which has adapted positively (one way or another) to redefinitions of gender and of racial politics and to the redistribution of power. Mundane masculinity refers to positions on the masculine hierarchy in the interstices between marginalized forms and hegemonic masculinities. Of greater concern is the unstated politics of Sipowicz’ stance: he is a recovering alcoholic and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. In other words, Sipowicz’ actions fall under the rubric of the “Serenity Prayer,” in which the faithful implore

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him Forever in the next (Neibuhr).

It is well worth noting that in popular discourse the section beginning “Living one day at a time” tends to be forgotten or not mentioned. Of course, the “Serenity Prayer” is also the type of axiom repeated by the Promise Keepers, a group whose aims are political but not in the name of diversity. For example, countless commentators such as Bill McCartney, Rush Limbaugh and Connie Neal – connected through such groups as the Promise Keepers, Focus on the Family and Colorado for Family Values – have made a career of speaking and writing on behalf of a conservative agenda. Their reductive rhetoric often claims the Serenity Prayer among its tenets. Neal’s works, which include the fire (and brimstone) side classics on how to

save our children from occult works like the Harry Potter stories, serve as constant reminders that the same ethic can be adopted by those who would have a patriarchal order maintained, rather than reformed. However, it is worth noting that Sipowicz provides a peculiarly urban counterpoint to the largely rural and midwestern power base of the right. Furthermore, the effect is not always negative. For example, Sipowicz' most recent partner, John Clark, Jr., is the son of an old enemy. Sipowicz and other veterans mistrust the elder Clark's police work as soft. For example, when he was a rookie, Clark called for backup and fired upon a plaster statue of the Dutch Boy Paint mascot, which he mistook for a robbery suspect. Later, Clark folded on the witness stand which allowed a murderer to go free and commit more crimes. The new partnership caused a rift between the Clarks, especially since a drunken Sipowicz frequently reminded Clark Sr. of his mistakes. Yet the recovering Sipowicz not only acknowledges his share of the blame for the dispute, he made several attempts to reconcile the father and the son prior to the former's suicide ("Ho Down," "You've Got Mail"). When Clark Sr. took his own life, Sipowicz filled out the report as an accident to protect the family name. He changed something that could be changed. He also accepted something that could not change insofar as Sipowicz and the elder Clark never reconciled their differences.

Finally, the process through which Sipowicz' change has occurred poses the greatest concern while offering the greater hope. Rather than attempting to impose change from without, *NYPD: Blue's* makers show us that the very tendencies of masculinities based on the hegemonic model can be the means of their own demise. In other words, by accepting the things that he cannot change, Sipowicz responds like the sturdy oak that Kimmel describes. Very often the response, if not one of silence, is one of grudging acceptance of the fact that he cannot change the situation – which is contingent with the preceding problematics. In fact, George Bonanno, a psychology professor, contradicts the popular notion that people need to talk through their grief to reach "closure." In his studies, Bonanno "found that those who focused on their pain, either by talking about it or displaying it in their facial expressions, tended to have more trouble sleeping and maintaining everyday functions. In other words, there may be benefits to the [now] discredited practice of keeping [a] stiff upper lip" (Labi 43). For those of us intent on dismantling rigidly defined gender roles which are based on a binaristic and oppositional model, employing the features of hegemonic masculinity – regardless of the intent or the outcome – leaves intact the means through which that masculine formation has secured its dominance.

The key lies in recognizing the locations and instances of departures from hegemonic masculinity because Sipowicz, like many males belonging to the demographic he represents, does not always function as such. Antony Easthope finds that "a main feature of the masculine myth [is] a social order relying on the endless negotiation of conflict" (22). This is a fitting description of the culture in which Sipowicz operates. The man and the occupation become conflated as police life replicates and reinforces masculine life. Not surprisingly, Easthope suggests that the masculine ego is "generally imaged as a military fortification" (37). Easthope then compares it to the Panopticon since both are set up as defenses against enemies within and without the system. Thus, he concludes "the purpose of the masculine ego [. . .] is to *master* every threat" (39-40). However, Easthope fails to follow his own premise. The defining difference, as I understand it, is that assimilation works in reverse for mundane masculinity according to which males adapt to their culture instead of males forcing others to adapt. Mundane masculinities often have less to do with mastering and more to do with not being mastered.

For Sipowicz, this becomes most clear in the last two seasons during which many outstanding issues were resolved. Perhaps predictably, the show ends on an indeterminate note, which coincides with Sipowicz' own negotiations of his masculinity. In the final season,

Lt. Rodriguez retires and his replacement, Lt. Bale, is a former Internal Affairs Bureau (IAB) investigator. Rank-and-file cops refer to IAB as the “rat squad” since they investigate police actions. This makes Bale suspect from Sipowicz’ perspective as a cop, as a leader and as a man. Complicating the issue is the fact that Rodriguez was shot by a drunken, deranged IAB captain, who received minimal punishment – dismissal – for the act. Although Sipowicz and Bale clash several times over procedural matters, their mutual dedication to the job leads to an eventual respect. On many occasions Sipowicz explained that his only motivation is solving a case. His respect for Bale and his modified masculinity show most poignantly when an investigation into stolen credit cards reveals Bale’s own card (“Bale Out”). The suspect took the cards from men who frequent “gay bars” and did so under the assumption that such men would not want their sexuality revealed. Upon receiving his card, Bale asked Sipowicz what he would do with the information. Sipowicz tells Bale that nothing will happen. The information is not important. The case had been solved without it.

His dogged pursuit – goal oriented behavior – also occasions Sipowicz’ recognition that others share his motivation. Thus, differences take on less significance and ultimately dissolve. Indeed, the dynamic provides the basis of the last episode (“Moving Day”). In order to solve a murder, Sipowicz, acting as squad leader while Bale recovers from a gunshot, risks offending a retired chief and in turn the current Chief of Detectives. The former chief, now a security consultant, attempts to protect a client who happens to be the prime suspect. In so doing, the chief takes advantage of the inexperience of two rookies and obtains information he can use to obstruct the investigation. Despite the former chief’s assurances about his client’s innocence, and the current chief’s warning to stop the investigation, Sipowicz risks disapprobation from his superiors and instead follows the evidence, the squad’s suspicions, and his instincts.

Not surprisingly, the instincts are correct. Nevertheless, Sipowicz’ superior rankles at the insubordination and dresses down Sipowicz in front of the squad, including Lt. Bale who had returned to empty his office. Bale’s wound left him paralyzed and he will be retiring, but not before recommending that Sipowicz be a permanent replacement. In typical Sipowicz fashion, he recognizes the demands of the role and makes no secret of his reluctance to accept it. Following his appointment, Sipowicz refuses to occupy the office until Bale removes his belongings. This is both a sign of respect and of apprehension. The apprehension was put to rest by the assurances of the squad for whom the appointment represents official recognition of a *de facto* state. Yet such recognition does not matter to Sipowicz, who nearly declined the promotion to sergeant which facilitated his new job. On his way out, Bale pauses to congratulate Sipowicz and explains the challenge of leading a squad: protect the public and the people you command, but please the people above. Sipowicz asks about his prospects. Bale responds that Sipowicz has the first two covered but should “watch out for the last one.” The episode (and the series) ends with Sipowicz at his new desk. However, this ending is more ambivalent than happy. As a sergeant, Sipowicz is a provisional leader during a shortage of lieutenants. As the prayer affirms, the status and his masculinity are subject to daily negotiation. That said, the promise of the future rests with the two rookies. Despite their blunder, Sipowicz does not berate them in the same manner exhibited by the Chief of Detectives. Instead, he compliments on the good things they did during the investigation, especially overcoming their mistakes and learning from the experience. Thus, Sipowicz will be a different kind of boss, representing a different kind of masculinity.

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NOTES

1. While there is critical literature about *NYPD: Blue*, little academic attention has been paid to the series. It should be added that Andy Sipowicz, played by Dennis Franz, is the only character to appear in every episode during the show's twelve-year run.
2. The similarities between Andy Sipowicz and his TV ratings rival, Det. Lenny Briscoe of NBC's *Law & Order* are well worth mentioning. Both detectives are recovering alcoholics, tend to bend the rules of investigation, have strained relations with their children and ex-spouses, have lost a child to murder and generally have had partners from different age, race and cultural backgrounds. The most significant difference, though, is not between the characters but between the respective dramas. *NYPD: Blue* has always focused on the characters, their relationships and their struggles. In contrast, as *Law & Order's* apostrophe indicates, the show concentrates on the issues surrounding each particular case. Character development occurs incidentally.
3. I first coined the term, "mundane masculinity," in the final section of my doctoral dissertation.
4. The third part of Connell's formula has become more important since September 11th 2001. However, part of Sipowicz' character includes being a Vietnam veteran; a trait shared by actor Dennis Franz. Occasionally, Sipowicz' military experience plays a role in the story, as it did with the man seeking to commit welfare fraud by posing as his disabled older brother following the brother's death. In addition, the perpetrator sought to terrorize Arab Americans as imagined retaliation for the September 11th 2001 attacks and for the older brother's war wounds, which occurred during the 1991 incursion into Iraq ("Baby Love").
5. In terms of its reality-based format, *NYPD: Blue* draws heavily from writer Bill Clark's own experiences as a New York City police detective. As well, many of the cast and crew, including producer Steven Bochco, also worked on *Hill Street Blues*, which was widely praised for its gritty portrayals.
6. Lane's study is one of the (very) few that consider *NYPD: Blue*. That said, Lane's primary focus is the existential angst of the detectives on *Homicide: Life on the Street*, which aired on NBC during roughly the same period as *NYPD: Blue*.
7. In this regard it takes its cue from Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. Faludi, a Pulitzer Prize-winner and one of North America's best-known feminists, is moved to ask of the contemporary situation of masculinities: "If men are the masters of their fate, what do they do about the unspoken sense that they are being mastered, in the marketplace and at home, by forces that seem to be sweeping away the soil beneath their feet? If men are mythologized as the ones who *make things happen*, then how can they begin to analyze what is *happening to them*?" (*Stiffed* 13). Faludi's earlier work, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, details the institutionalized systemic sources of resistance to feminism and women's advancement, but now she considers men as the subjects rather than the creators of their world.
8. Indeed, the feature in *The Economist* confirms the consumerist orientation of the metrosexual trend. For example, Sports network ESPN has a metrosexual questionnaire which will help

determine one's metrosexuality (SportsNation). The survey asks the amount spent on a haircut, the likelihood of using expensive skin and hair products and other consumer oriented queries. In other words, it functions as a thinly veiled market survey, complete with sponsors' links, of ESPN's target audience.

9. In fact, the haircuts are more symbolic since they occasion consultative conversations between Irvin and Sipowicz, especially when Irvin's father was terminally ill.

10. As viewers know, Sipowicz' phallic functionality has been reaffirmed through McDowell's miraculous pregnancy.

11. A similar incident occurs when a IRS agent who had been kidnapped while visiting a bathhouse accuses Sipowicz and Sorenson of homophobia ("Everyone into the Poole"). John Irvin assures the man that the detectives only consider issues as they pertain to the case.

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