

# Exploring Masculinity Through Men's Lifestyle Magazines

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**T**HROUGHOUT THE HISTORY of American print media, advertising has normalized ideas of hegemonic masculinity. In recent times, magazines have become an essential carrier of these depictions of masculine power. Men's lifestyle magazines commonly support a specific view of a masculine ideal, with their appeal to a broad male readership interested in topics such as health, fashion, and wealth. These magazines influence men to meet the gender expectations that advertisements and articles inside them support. Analyzing the methods these types of magazines use to portray masculinity and male expectations of masculinity can help us understand why and how most male readers are influenced.

In the article on "Investigating Hegemonic Masculinity," Rosemary Ricciardelli and her associates address the content of men's lifestyle magazines. Her analysis includes eight magazines sold in Canada from 2004 to 2006, where they research how masculinity is portrayed. Ricciardelli hypothesizes that you can find social relations of hegemonic masculinity in each magazine by looking at the similarities in terms of expectations of body, aesthetics, and fashion. As the author notes, "appearance can be manipulated—but it should also be enhanced" (Ricciardelli et al. 64) She accurately summarizes the supposed ideals that these lifestyle magazines support.

Ricciardelli and colleagues start their investigation by explaining past thoughts on hegemonic masculinity. They describes hegemony as a culturally normal ideal of masculinity. With this in mind, one can view masculine hegemony as a status, role, or set of behaviors given by society (Ricciardelli et al. 64). There are many different norms regarding masculinity. However, physical power and evident authority often outshine the other ideals. A professional athlete along with the CEO of a major company both embody the societal norm of masculinity (Ricciardelli et al. 64). Although the athlete represents physical strength and the CEO has authority over others, the idea of power is consistent throughout. The masculine hegemony idealized in these magazines can drastically affect readers' thoughts on their appearance, sexuality, behavior, violence, valuing public occupation over family, and domination over women (Ricciardelli et al. 64).

Past research has been performed dealing with gender expectations created in magazines. However, these portrayals were usually a part of women's lifestyle magazines (Ricciardelli et al. 67). Ricciardelli and others discuss the lack of studies on this men's lifestyle magazine, explaining that the majority of articles examining masculine expectations were based on male fitness magazines. She also compares the trends men's

magazines have followed versus women's, noting that most magazines aimed towards men supported occupational work roles far more than women's magazines.

Using a range of magazines that were popular between November 2004 and August 2006, the researchers start by analyzing the most-read magazines in Canada during that time period. Their analysis looks at all aspects of the magazines, from the cover to each picture, graphic, and article. They chose their sample by grouping genre, popularity, and gender of target audience. With these limitations, the eight men's lifestyle magazines researched in this article include *Details*, *OUT*, *GQ*, *Men's Health*, *Esquire*, *Maxim*, *Stuff*, and *FHM*. Most men and women are likely aware of the popularity of these choices. Each page of the magazine is coded into a table based on given categories. Some stories might be put into a "sports" category and others might be grouped in an "entertainment" category (Ricciardelli et al. 68). Following the categorization, each sample is then rated on the relevance of the researched topic. Over 95% of the pages were included in the analysis, showing how relevant most aspects of the magazines are to the research (Ricciardelli et al. 68).

In their results, Ricciardelli and others identified a few key characteristics of each magazine that distinguishes them from the rest. For example, *FHM*, *Stuff*, and *Maxim* used more women in advertisements compared to the others. This type of content likely appeals to men's heterosexual attraction towards women, showing pictures of women in various sexualized poses and clothing (Ricciardelli et al. 69). These three magazines also had more violent sports, video games, and stunts, generalizing a representation of a youthful masculinity. In contrast, *Details* and *GQ* focus on business and high fashion. Aiming towards a "classier" audience, female models are dressed far more modestly while posing with polished,

manicured men (Ricciardelli et al. 72). Similarly, *GQ* and *Details* also publish far more on material wealth such as exclusive brand watches, appearance concerns, and other status symbols (Ricciardelli et al. 72). *Esquire* and *OUT* share characteristics of their content such as the importance of status symbols and an appeal to an older age demographic of readers. *OUT* magazine is known for its largely gay audience, as reflected in its sexualized representations of men in the advertisements. Finally, *Men's Health* has a greater focus on fitness and muscularity, including issues concerning dieting, strength training, and supplements (Ricciardelli et al. 73). *Men's Health* is the most distinguishable from the rest, using a far less metrosexual approach to the ideal performance of masculinity.

Ricciardelli and her constituents define the importance of muscularity regarding masculinity, meaning physical strength. While the need for physical strength has varied over time and place, the ideological centrality of masculine strength has maintained structural continuity. Whenever the societal norms of masculinity were challenged, a new idea of masculinity would always take its place, continuing the cycle (Ricciardelli et al. 65). For example, a recent form of masculinity is metrosexuality. This form distinguishes itself from the more traditional muscularity expectation of masculinity. Metrosexuality involves the idea that one can still be masculine without having oppressive relationships with men, women, and children (Ricciardelli et al. 65). Furthermore, the researchers write "metrosexuality places less focus on previously dominant manifestations of masculinity and instead emphasizes self-presentation, appearance, and grooming" (Ricciardelli et al. 65), accurately describing the difference between metrosexuality and traditional depictions of male sexuality. This information is important for the reader to know what

the author means when she discusses masculinity as a socially and historically defined concept, and to understand the past and current trends of male hegemony.

In "The Construction of Masculinity: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Men's Lifestyle Magazine Advertisements," Yue Tan and his fellow researchers address advertisements in men's lifestyle magazines in a more global manner. Tan offers an in-depth analysis of 636 ads across the three most popular magazines in Taiwan, China, and the United States, with the objective of determining how masculinity is portrayed throughout these countries, as well as any variations in the portrayals.

Tan and colleagues note that during the 1980s, magazines became a dependable way to advertise idealized representations of masculinity (Tan et al. 237). This newfound popularity of these types of magazines increased the use of male care products and fashion, resulting in a "branded masculinity, which is rooted in U.S. men's insecurities, generated by consumer capitalism." (Tan et al. 237). The researchers chose China due to the lack of research on this topic conducted outside of the West. With one of the largest growing markets of male products, examining China's advertisements might give a different perspective (Tan et al. 238). However, the author explains that men's magazines in China are based on Western perspectives, with the U.S. and the U.K. supplying the vast majority of media content. The globalization of the same content perpetuates the production of the same masculine ideologies, starting a bottleneck of local standards based on cultural norms. Along with the knowledge of how each magazine maintains hegemonic ideologies, exploring these similarities and differences can shed light on how global expectations of masculinity alter social norms, cultural norms, and local traditions (Tan et al. 238).

Tan et al.'s study focuses on three

questions. First, to explain the idea of global hegemonic masculinity by analyzing the similarities between men's magazines throughout the three countries. In contrast to the first question, the second question investigates the different cross-cultural portrayals of masculinity by exploring the ideologies each country mainly supports. The final question simply asks which role each type of masculinity plays in advertisements. All of these questions can be summarized in the general study of the 636 ads Tan and his researchers studied.

Tan and others start their methodology by looking at the advertisements shown in men's lifestyle magazines in Taiwan, China, and the United States from 2008 to 2010. The magazine selection consists of GQ, Esquire, and Men's Health (United States), Esquire, Men's Health, and FHM (China), Cool GQ, and Men's UNO (Taiwan). These magazines are chosen based on general popularity in each country. A randomized selection of twenty-seven issues is chosen, with an equal amount from each magazine. The scholars code types of masculinity portrayed by the main model on each page of the magazines into seven categories "Tough and Macho," "Refined and Gentle," "Stern and Sophisticated," "Vigorous and Sunny," "Trendy and Cool," "Sensual and Sexy," and "Androgynous." (Tan et al. 243). This categorization of masculinities is based on visual portrayals. Using this method, the researchers create percentages of the ideologies each male model represents and what role they are playing (Tan et al. 245).

The most prevalent type of masculinity throughout the magazines in all three countries is the "Stern and Sophisticated" look, with "Trendy and Cool" as a close follow-up (Tan et al. 244). Using a chi-square analysis, Tan and others discover that there are no statistically different trends in each culture. For the most part, all three countries followed a global model of masculinity.

However, the authors did note that cultural differences within the popular portrayals of masculinity are noticeably seen throughout each country. The roles male models are idealized to achieve varied in each culture. The U.S. shows models playing recreational roles such as sports and physical strength more frequently than China or Taiwan (Tan et al. 245). Taiwan and China support more professional and entertainment role models compared to the U.S. (Tan et al. 246). Tan et al. explain that although his results are not what he hypothesized, the information he discovers accurately portrays the complexity of a global perspective on views of masculinity. Furthermore, the researchers' work in all three countries will support new and more specific work within the field.

The book, *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* accurately summarizes the overarching topics on masculinities in men's magazines in its introduction. Written by Bethan Benwall, the introduction begins with a discussion of the magazine *Loaded*. Gaining popularity in Britain starting in the mid-nineties, *Loaded* introduced the idea of the 'new lad.' This term is used to describe an embodiment of masculinity that is common today, idealizing attributes such as strength, playboy attitudes/aspirations, and "tongue-in-cheek" sexism (Benwall 3). Benwall suggests a power connection between masculinity and popular culture. Men's lifestyle magazines can be seen as a popularizer of this connection (Benwall 4). After describing the definition of masculinity and the challenges that come with it, the author theorizes the ever-changing concept of masculinity. In regards to men's magazines, popular discourses have evolved from 'new man' to 'new lad' (Benwall 10). Benwall describes the 'new man' as a presentation of more traditional manhood, consisting of ideas of narcissism but also including the commitment of a father and a protector, contrasting with the 'new lad' ideology

popular in many men's lifestyle magazines today. Comparing the two clearly shows how the content of men's magazines and general masculine popularity stand in contrast to each other, granting variety to depictions of masculinity, thereby fortifying the structure of societal masculinity.

Approaching the 'new lad' concept, analyzing forms of new masculinity accurately shows the evolved state of today's ideologies. To preserve privilege, men construct a type of 'certitude.' Regarding men's magazines, the discourse of the content emphasizes exaggerated gender binarism, excluding anything that is other than masculine and feminine (Benwall 16). Benwall explains the innocence of general sexism these ideas support by noting the use of irony. Specifically, readers and writers of men's magazines use irony to slip out of accountability, relying on the forced knowledge that "sexism in 'new lad' culture is ironically, nostalgically and harmlessly meant," and only aimed toward "men who should know better." (Benwall 17) The author says it is not certain what future ideologies will be supported by men's lifestyle magazines. Within the magazine market as a whole, it is difficult to pinpoint an overall decline or gain. However small, statistical evidence is leaning toward a decline in popularity of the 'new lad' (Benwall 22). Although this article uses only the introduction of a book analyzing the topic, the ideas Benwall summarizes accurately depict the grand scheme of masculinities in men's lifestyle magazines, taking notions from the previous articles and condensing the content into an understandable and readable introduction.

Studying a specific medium for the transmission of masculine beliefs helps narrow down the ultimate role that magazine advertising, in this case, plays in our society. All three articles give a different outlook on the topic. "Investigating Hegemonic Masculinity" provides an accurate

depiction of hegemonic masculinity while also completing a well-executed analysis of issues of eight magazines popular in Canada. "The Construction of Masculinity: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Men's Lifestyle Magazine Advertisements" offers the idea of the globalization of masculinity, explaining how mass media affects and homogenizes cultural beliefs and ideologies. Finally, the introduction to the book *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* condenses all of

the previous content into the general idea of a 'new lad,' summing up today's views on masculinity. Analyzing men's lifestyle magazines can chart the circulation of popular notions of masculinity. By now, the articles discussed in this paper are between ten and twenty years old. Further research would show the extent to which their conclusions still stand true, and what new forms of masculinity have emerged.

#### WORKS CITED

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