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STYLISH HARD BODIES: BRANDED MASCULINITY IN MEN'S HEALTH MAGAZINE

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines a postmodern construct of masculinity in which male identity is based on consumption, a traditional role for women, rather than production. Data for this qualitative content analysis were drawn from a sample of Men's Health magazine. Analysis of the front covers, stories and features, an advice column, and advertisements reveals a construct that I identify as "branded masculinity." Branded masculinity is rooted in consumer capitalism wherein corporate profit can be enhanced by generating insecurity about one's body and one's consumer choices and then offering a solution through a particular corporate brand. The form of branded masculinity found in Men's Health constructs muscles combined with a fashion sense and the appearance of financial success as the necessary characteristics for a real man today.*

Hair is important. Which shampoo will I use today? Maybe PsychoPath® the sports shampoo with salon-grade micro protein packed in a manly black injection-molded plastic motor-oil canister. Your hair is you—your tribe—it's your badge of clean. Hair is your document. What's on top of your head says what's inside your head.

—Tyler, in Douglas Coupland, *Shampoo Planet*

In Douglas Coupland's Generation X novel, *Shampoo Planet* (1992), Tyler, the twenty-two-year-old protagonist, is continually concerned with choosing the *right* hair care products. Searching for his identity revolves not around a job, which Tyler lacks, but around appearance. Self-doubt and fear of not finding a place in the new world economy, rather than any narcissistic impulse, induces Tyler into excessive concern about grooming. From a sociological perspective, Tyler illustrates that the hegemonic masculinity of his father's or grandfather's day is mutating under the stresses of a new social structure in which consumption is more important than production. Masculinity itself is constructed as a product available for consumption if one merely chooses the appropriate brand names. The

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process of consuming masculinity through name brands is fully understood by Tyler. When considering which styling spritz to use to complete his hair grooming, Tyler selects a gift from his mother, Mist of Naralon®: "I haven't used it much—it's not advertised enough and is hence suspect. Always better to buy well-advertised products—preferably those products endorsed by a celebrity like Bert Rockney, my favorite actor—steroidal death toy and star of the blockbuster Hollywood motion picture *HawkWarrior*, which I've seen five times and heartily recommend" (Coupland 1992:133). The image of masculinity constructed purposely to sell a brand-name product also shapes the way men see themselves and others. Moving to the macrolevel, changing ideas of masculinity signal that a significant transformation of the social structure is under way.

More than two decades ago, social theorists (Baudrillard 1981; Bell 1973; Derida 1966; Lyotard 1984) established that Western societies like the United States were undergoing a shift from a modern industrial culture based on production to a postmodern culture informed by the consumption of products, ideas, and knowledge. As a transformation of the material base of society occurs, social institutions and cultural practices also undergo a transformation. One area in which this change is unmistakable is gender roles and gender identity. Numerous studies (Fraser 1989; Nicholson 1990; Smith 1987) have found that the postindustrial shift is affecting women's roles in society. For example, the increasing number of women in the formal economy, both as wage earners and as consumers, has been well documented (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Hartmann 1976; Tilly and Scott 1978). Corporations, in their drive to increase profits by expanding market shares, exploit the changing economic structure and the accompanying changes in consumer identity through advertising. An example is cigarette companies' play on feminist ideas of the 1970s: "You've come a long way baby!" This Virginia Slims slogan and others demonstrate the intentional targeting by advertisers of women whose economic and political power was on the rise after the 1970s women's movement.

Women's traditional gender role as housewife and mother implicitly included the task of consumption. From groceries to beauty products, women were the consumers and men the producers. While corporations have an interest in maintaining some aspects of traditional gender roles to ensure continued markets for their products—women's cosmetics are a prime example—they also serve as agents of social change by creating new consumer markets. The postmodern shift in women's gender role can be seen in new careers for women in the workplace and new consumer products for women that range from business suits to personal trainers.

The impact of social structural change on women is well documented, but less research has been devoted to the impact on men. I am interested here in how masculinity is constructed in the popular culture of a postmodern consumer society in which the male identity is based on consumption, a traditional female role, rather than on production. To make visible the masculine gender ideas present in postmodern America, this study presents a qualitative content analysis of the magazine *Men's Health*.

THE MASCULINE GENDER IDEAL

According to Cohen (2001:5), a gender ideal is formed by “the shared beliefs or models of gender that a majority of society accepts as appropriate masculinity or femininity,” and gender display is “the variety of ways in which we reveal, through our verbal and nonverbal demeanor, that we fit in with masculine and feminine ideas.” Ample evidence exists that a gender ideal is socially constructed in a specific historical and cultural context and that it changes over time and according to environment.

Constructs of Masculinity: Real Men, Marketplace Masculinity, and Supermales

The hegemonic masculine gender role as identified by Brannon (1976) contains four themes: No Sissy Stuff, the Big Wheel, the Sturdy Oak, and Give 'Em Hell! Brannon notes, first, that “a ‘real man’ must never, never resemble women, or display strongly stereotyped feminine characteristics” (p. 14). Physically, real men have deep voices, avoid the use of cosmetics, and give minimal attention to their clothes and hygiene. Emotionally, real men present themselves as invulnerable, and they repress expressions of affection toward other men. Behaviorally, real men devalue traditional female activities, from child care to poetry. The second theme, the Big Wheel, centers on the ability of real men to obtain wealth, fame, success, and status. Typically, the Big Wheel is determined by a man’s occupation, but it can also be achieved through other routes, such as being a champion video game player. The Sturdy Oak conveys manliness, confidence, and self-reliance. Here Brannon provides numerous popular culture references as illustrations. From Humphrey Bogart to John Wayne, a real man is physically a man’s man. The Give 'Em Hell men emit an aura of aggression and violence and use it to obtain sex from women. Since Brannon’s study, other versions of masculine gender ideals and dominant male gender norms have appeared (Connell 1995; Doyle 1994; Gerzon 1992).

Kimmel (2001) unearths the historical roots of masculine ideals in the United States. Eighteenth-century models of manhood include the “Genteel Patriarch,” whose standing derived from landownership and who was refined, elegant, and sexual but also a doting father; and the “Heroic Artisan,” whose physical strength and republican virtue is exemplified in the yeoman farmer and the craftsman. These early forms of manhood reflected ideals of an economy based on a premodern mode of production, agriculture. Kimmel claims that these ideals of manhood were shattered in the 1830s by a new ideal, “Marketplace Manhood.” According to Kimmel (2001:30), “Marketplace Man derived his identity entirely from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the businessman.”

Ideas of masculinity not only change over time, they may change during the course of one’s lifetime. Harris (1995) sampled 560 men in the United States to determine the influence of gender role messages on men. He identified nine messages that illustrate modern expectations for men: “be like your father; be a

faithful husband, Good Samaritan, law, nature lover, nurturer, rebel, scholar, and technician" (p. 13). Although attitudes about masculinity varied by geographic location, class, race, sexual orientation, and family background, Harris found that generational differences were the strongest variable in differing visions of masculinity. Subsequent research on popular culture aimed at a younger audience has found traditional masculine gender ideals intact. Hollander's (2001:489) analysis of the television program *Studs* identified six "recipes for success" as a stud: be big, be strong, be (hetero)sexual, be young, be generous, and desire a studette of the same race and similar age as oneself. Strate (2001) found that the gender message produced by corporations in the form of advertisements for beer promotes similar types of traditional masculine gender roles.

The construct of an ideal masculinity is influenced by a number of intervening factors, such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality, age, and religion. Majors and Billson (1992) found that African American male street culture uses "style" for the express purpose of display or defiance, in contrast to Brannon's (1976) "real man," who holds that fashion is feminine. White and White (1998) note that flashy American African male dress had its roots in African aesthetics and the cultural resistance of slaves so as to reclaim their bodies. Focusing on the Chicano male gender identity, Baca Zinn (2001) finds that a structural condition in which Chicanos are subordinated and excluded may contribute to a culture in which machismo gives men a degree of power and control.

While acknowledging the dynamics of many forms of ideal masculinities, some research stresses a particular aspect of the evolving conceptualization of masculinity. For example, Connell (2001:65) describes a "transnational business masculinity" that emerged in the postcolonial period. This hegemonic form of masculinity, associated with business executives in the global marketplace, is exemplified by the tendency to commodify relationships with women—the growth of hotels catering to businessmen by offering pornographic videos, for example. Kimmel (2001:35) suggests, "Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood." Masculinity, then, stems from the fear of being seen as sissy, feminine, or anything less than a man. In a similar vein, the Media Education Foundation (1999) asserts that men today wear the mask of the "Tough Guise." The Tough Guise is a performance in which violent masculinity is the norm. It represents a backlash to feminism, gay rights, racial and ethnic equality, and military impotency during the Vietnam War, all of which are perceived as a threat to the dominant culture of white, heterosexual men. Moreover, the Media Education Foundation notes that the performance of the Tough Guise is more complex for men of color who perform the "cool pose" of urban gangster masculinity learned from MTV and films such as *The Godfather*. Further complicating ideas of masculinity is that the cool pose is imitated by young, white, suburban men in their quest for a male identity.

Empirical evidence suggests that ideals of masculinity are affecting men's and boys' understanding of their self-identities and behaviors. Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000:6) coined the term "the Adonis Complex" to describe "an array of usually secret, but surprisingly common, body image concerns of boys and men." These concerns range from a preoccupation with building muscles, eliminating

fat, using anabolic steroids, binge eating, hair loss, and penis size. Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia conclude that the significant number of boys and men suffering from body dysmorphia, particularly as manifest in muscle dysmorphia, is due in large part to the media-generated images of the "supermale" combined with the male body industries that seek profits built on male insecurities.

Popular Culture and Emerging Constructs of Ideal Masculinity

Goffman laid the foundation for sociologists interested in the gender display found in popular culture through his seminal work, *Gender Advertisements* (1976). Goffman understood gender display not as biologically predetermined but as a performance of a gender ideal that one can more or less adhere to: "One might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender" (Goffman 1976:8). For Goffman, women and men "read" images of femininity and masculinity and then attempt to mimic them when giving a gender performance. While feminine and masculine images may come from any number of agents of socialization, Goffman's analysis of advertisements shows the importance of popular culture in the construction of gender.

Girls have long dealt with unrealistic body expectations, with struggling to remake the body seen in the mirror into a tall, ultra-slim, large-breasted Barbie doll; boys now experience a similar gap between the reality seen in the mirror and the hypermuscular G.I. Joe action-figure image found in popular culture. (If given life-size status, G.I. Joe Extreme would have a 55-inch chest and 27-inch biceps, nearly 10 inches larger than those of baseball slugger Mark McGwire.) Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000) find supermales not only in male action figures but also in video games, sports (notably, the World Wrestling Federation), movies, advertisements, and the growing number of magazines such as *Men's Health* that cater to men's body concerns.

Work on gender images in popular culture often focuses on the visual display of the passive body, with the audience giving meaning to the images. By contrast, Bordo (2000:186) finds that images are active: "The most compelling images are suffused with 'subjectivity'—they *speak* to us, they seduce us. Unlike other kinds of 'objects' (chairs and tables, for example), they don't let us use them in any way we like. In fact, they exert considerable power over us—over our psyches, our desires, our self image." Bordo examines the way in which male bodies speak to us today, particularly in popular culture. She identifies two messages in the men's bodies of magazine advertisements, "face-off masculinity" and "the lean." Face-off masculinity occurs when the male models "stare coldly at the viewer, defying the observer to view them in any way other than how they present themselves as powerful, armored, emotionally impenetrable" (p. 186). The lean describes a body that is reclining, leaning against or propped up against something—a pose that is more typical in women's imagery. The lean is not passive; it actively invites the viewer to linger over the body. Both messages, however, share the function of selling products to consumers. Bordo attributes the growing problematic with men's bodies to "the ever-widening vortex of late-twentieth-century consumerism" (p. 18).

The link made by theorists between masculine identities and popular culture is significant. Visual representations serve as agents of masculine gender socialization. It is commonly accepted that the media's depiction of female gender roles, from the 1950s TV housewife in pearls and high heels to Britney Spears's bared abdomen, have set the stage for ideas of femininity. Less work has been done on the media's explicit use of intentionally constructed male gender displays and subsequent ideas of masculinity.

Undoubtedly, the role of men is changing today in a profound way. But do notions of marketplace masculinity still hold in a postindustrial consumer-based economy? Are new postmodern ideals of masculinities emerging, and if so, what are they? As boys and men consume popular culture and advertisements, they also consume the masculine gender ideals associated with specific products. Whereas producers and advertisers may promote particular forms of gender socialization inadvertently, *Men's Health* magazine's goal is explicitly to shape the reader's views of masculinity so as to transform modern men into postmodern consumers. In other words, male gender role resocialization is the product.

MEN'S HEALTH: MASCULINITY ON DISPLAY

Men's Health was launched in 1987. In 1990 it claimed 250,000 subscribers, and by 2000 that number had risen to 1.6 million (Cloud 2000:65). In 2001 *Men's Health* grossed \$115 million, making it 67th on the list of top-selling magazines, with gross revenues comparable to *Architectural Digest*, *Brides Magazine*, and *The Economist*. Significant for this study, *Men's Health* had substantially larger revenues than the longer-running *Popular Mechanics*, *Field & Stream*, and *Esquire* (AdAge.com 2003). According to Mediamark Research (2002), 85.05 percent of the readers of *Men's Health* are men whose mean age is 36. The age distribution is as follows: 23 percent ages 18–24, 25 percent ages 25–34, 23 percent ages 35–44, 18 percent ages 45–54, and 11 percent age 55+. Mediamark's demographics indicate that the magazine's readers are generally well educated and have a middle-class income; 67 percent attended college; 32 percent have college degrees and postcollege training; and their median household income is \$63,700, with 25 percent earning more than \$100,000. Mediamark also finds that 45 percent of the readers of *Men's Health* are married and 40 percent have children in the household. It did not provide data on readers' race or ethnicity or sexual orientation.¹

The success of this relatively new men's magazine focusing on fashion, health, and lifestyle suggests that it is providing its readers with a view of masculinity that is more appealing than that presented in traditional men's magazines. *Men's Health* serves as a historical artifact of the early-twenty-first century in terms of the problematic of masculinity faced by well-educated, middle-class men in a era of changing gender norms. My purpose here is to analyze the specific gender role socialization that is occurring in *Men's Health* and to place it in the context of broader social and cultural changes. To take into account format changes that might occur in a monthly magazine, a random sample of ten issues of *Men's Health* (20% of the sampling frame of forty-eight issues) covering the period between December 1997 and December 2001 was selected. The analysis is divided

into four areas of investigation: front covers, cover stories and features, "Ask *Men's Health*," and advertisements.

Front Cover Messages

McCracken (1993:14), in her study of women's magazines, explains that their covers accomplish two purposes. First, they are "windows to the future self," in that they serve as "selective frames that color both our perceptions of ideal femininity and what is to follow in the magazine." Second, they are themselves advertisements that increase the publisher's sales and, perhaps more important, the sale of products and services promoted inside. According to McCracken, advertising revenue is secured through covers that draw "quality" readers, meaning ones with spending power.

Using McCracken's study as a starting point for a gender analysis of men's magazine covers, I found that *Men's Health* covers reveal distinct patterns. The central feature is the photographic image, which reflects a homogeneous "future self" to a very specific group of men. All covers in the sample featured white men estimated to be between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five. On nine of the ten issues an attractive man was pictured from just below the waist up; the tenth cover was a partial head shot. None of the models is presented in an identifiable setting. Although two models appear to be standing in water, it is not clear whether this is a pool, a Jacuzzi, or the ocean. The lack of context means that the models are not doing anything other than posing for the viewers, a pattern typical of women's magazine images. One of the models is shown grasping a handheld weight, but the position is so awkward that the impression is not one of weightlifting but of posing with a prop. Most of the models are shirtless; three of ten male cover models were wearing shirts, one a standard white T-shirt and the others revealing muscle shirts that accentuate their well-defined pecs and pumped biceps. All the models have well-developed muscles, but they clearly are not the supermales featured on the covers of magazines devoted to bodybuilding. Arms, pectorals, and "six-pack" abdomen muscles are well defined. The cover images present the image of masculinity, at least for white males, as a well-toned but not overly muscled body.

Using Bordo's (1999) terms, two of the ten covers could be categorized as face-off masculinity and one as the lean (the model is leaning forward with his forearms extended above his head and resting on what appears to be a chin-up bar). The seven remaining covers present a third message about masculinity that I call "wholesome masculinity." Here the gaze is neither defiant nor passive; rather, the model smiles at the viewer, sometimes broadly, sometimes shyly. Goffman (1976:48) noted that smiles can "function as ritualistic mollifiers, signaling that nothing agonistic is intended or invited." Wholesome masculinity reveals male vulnerability, as on the December 1997 cover, which shows a broadly smiling model gently holding his left arm with his right hand—a traditionally feminine gesture. The image constructed is that these men are both physically powerful and emotionally caring, and the direct eye contact combined with a smile can be interpreted to mean that these are men to be trusted—as husband, partner, or

friend—depending on the context in which the reader is viewing it. Wholesome masculinity stands in sharp contrast to the masculinity often presented on film, whether brute magnetism (Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*) or the stoic, hyperphysical (Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2 Judgment Day*). It welcomes viewers to join in the pursuit of health and fitness by perusing the pages of the magazine.

Another striking feature of the covers is the use of color. The photographic image is black-and-white, giving *Men's Health* a distinctive appearance on the magazine rack and lending edginess to a magazine that features health and fashion ideas, traditional feminine pursuits. The black-and-white photographic image, set in a white background, is punctuated by bursts of color in the text. The title, *Men's Health*, appears in deep red or bright orange. The text accompanying the image alternates between red and black and appears in a vertical line down one side of the cover. For example, in the March 1999 issue, the largest typeface, following the title "Hard Body Basics" (in red), is preceded by "Pull Her Sex Trigger" in black (only the word "Sex" is in large font). Thus, if one reads only the large type, a message connecting sex and hard bodies emerges through the juxtaposition of snippets. Another example: reading only the large type of the July–August 2000 issue from top to bottom, one finds the message, Body, Beer, Abs, Still Fat? The large fonts come from "Get Your Body Back: The Best Exercises of All Times," "Fix Every Problem with Beer," "Building Abs That Show," "Still Fat (We'll Fix That!)" "Beer" and "Still Fat" are in red, and "Body" and "Abs" are in black, thus connecting the pairs thematically. Covertly, the magazine sends the message, through the use of large type for specific keywords, that beer results in fat but that this can be resolved by the exercises presented in the magazine. On most issues, a small yellow box or star also appears, highlighting a special feature such as "Free Workout Poster Inside," "Win! A Beer Vacation," or "Bonus Section 200 Ways to Look Better." In a format that parallels women's magazines, short snippets on the cover reveal the content of the issue.

Table 1 shows the five topics that appear most frequently in the snippets on the covers of *Men's Health*. Clearly, the most significant message about masculinity, which is featured on all ten covers, is that men should build and maintain a hard body. The themes fat and weight and diet and food appear in nine of the ten issues. Indeed, the central difference between *Men's Health* and a women's magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* is that the former promotes a hard body and the latter promotes a thin body. With this exception, these snippets on diet and fat reduction (or a slightly altered version to take into account the sex of the primary reader) could easily appear on the cover of a women's magazine.

Two of the ten issues analyzed in this study have a reverse cover. Appearing on the back of the front cover and inverted was the caption "Men's Health Guide to Style." Both reverse covers feature a white man approximately thirty years old. The models are dressed in casual suits and are not wearing ties. Both smile broadly at the reader. One is given the impression that underneath these suits are the hard bodies displayed on the front cover.

Foremost, *Men's Health* covers and reverse covers construct masculinity as having the ability to create a particular appearance, a stylish hard body. Creating

TABLE 1
Men's Health Cover Themes

Themes	% Of Covers With Each Theme	Examples
Hard body (muscle, getting in shape)	100	"Hard Body Basics" "Harden Your Whole Body" "The Easy Way to Hard Abs"
Fat/weight reduction	90	"Beat The Fat" "Foods That Fight Fat" "15-Minute Fat Burners"
Diet/food	90	"The Energy Diet" "New Anti-Stress Diet" "The 37 Worst Things to Put in Your Mouth"
Health	80	"Best Home Remedies for Men" "Beat Fatigue for Good" "Pain Control: Banish Backache for Good"
Sex	70	"Sex So Good She'll Tell Her Friends" "Sex School: Pull an All-Nighter" "Sex with Aliens: Women Explained"

a hard body involves building muscle tone and minimizing body fat. Men watch their diets primarily for the purpose of constructing hard bodies and not because they are concerned about health risks such as heart attack, prostate cancer, or the side effects of steroid use. The word *Sex* appears on seven of the ten covers, which suggests that one of the perks of creating a fit, hard body is dynamic sex. The use of a reverse cover emphasizing style suggests that covering the male body with a T-shirt or sweatpants is not appropriate. Rather, hard bodies are to be stylishly attired.

Cover Stories and Features

The table of contents of *Men's Health* is arranged topically, but the topics have changed over the four-year period of my study. In the December 1997 issue the content is divided between "cover features and stories" and "men's health departments." By December 2001 distinct content categories have emerged that include "Cover Stories & Features," "Nutrition," "Fitness," "Health," "Sex & Relationships," "Guy Knowledge," and "In Every Issue." Many of the cover stories and feature articles are advertised as snippets on the front cover. Cover stories and features are two to six pages long and are accompanied by color photos or graphics. Cover stories and features have been consistent components of the magazine over the four-year period under study here and have been consistently given most of the space in the magazine (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Topics of Cover Stories and Features

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Hard body exercise/weight lifting 23/102 (23%)	"The Easy Way to Hard Abs." "Full-Body Dumbbell Workout."
Health and medical advice 17/102 (17%)	"Test Your Health: Ten Fast Health Exams You Can Do with Your Fingers." "No Flu for You! & Steps to Surviving the Cold and Flu Season."
Sex/relationships 13/102 (13%)	"Make It Big in Bed. When You're Having Sex, Angles Matter More than Size." "Women Confess Their Sneakiest Secrets."
Weight loss/fat reduction 11/102 (11%)	"Trim 2 Inches Off Your Waist." "Foods that fight fat. What Women Can Teach You About Getting Thin."
Advice for men by men 11/102 (11%)	"Are You Half the Man Your Grandfather Was?" "Amazing Guys, Amazing Advice."
Diet/nutrition 10/102 (10%)	"The Red-Hot Chile Pepper Diet." "The Energy Diet."
General tips 8/102 (8%)	"Be a Man of the World: The 10 Trips Every Man Should Take." "The Wise Man's Guide to Christmas."
Fashion 7/102 (7%)	"Clothed for the Season: Off-the-Slope Fashions That No Ski Bunny Can Resist." "Beat Cold Feet: We Pick the Eight Best Boots to Help You Stomp Out Winter."
Survey/contest 2/102 (2%)	"Win Your Weight in Beer!"

Not surprising, five of the six most frequently appearing stories and features are the same as the front cover snippets: creating a hard body, 23 percent; health and medical advice, 17 percent; sex and relationships, 13 percent; fat reduction and weight loss, 11 percent; and nutrition and diet, 10 percent. Articles on creating a hard body follow a standard pattern: an illustrated description of the exercises used to build muscles or eliminate fat and a schedule for achieving results. "The Weekend Training Plan" (December 1997) details how a busy professional can stay fit through weekend exercise. The July–August 2000 issue identifies "The Best Exercises of All Time." These include pushups, arm-blaster curls, running, and circuit weight training. At the end of the article is a trifold, "The Best Damn Strength Workout Ever," which features a model with a variety of weightlifting equipment demonstrating sixteen exercises. Also included is a "strength schedule" that lists the exercise, sets, and repetitions to be completed each day of the week. The foldout exercise sheet is to be completed as the reader follows the exercise program. I found that trifolds appeared in six of the ten magazines analyzed.

The remaining four magazines had articles containing exercise programs, with models demonstrating the exercise, but they were not in the foldout format.

At times, cover stories and features explicitly link building a hard body with consumerism. McCracken (1993:49) describes the process whereby articles complement paid advertisements as "brand reciprocity." Brand reciprocity allows the promotion of products under the guise of editorials or articles. *Men's Health* contains numerous examples. In the article "Buyer's Guide Muscle at Any Cost" (December 2000), readers are guided through the process of creating a home gym. Three levels of "workouts" are provided, \$100, \$1,000, and \$10,000. For each budget level, specific equipment is pictured along with a price and a contact number.

One article provides an image that may encourage the Adonis Complex. "How to Become a Greek God," two pages long, is in the form of a centerfold playmate. A photograph of the statue of Doryphoros from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts serves as the male centerfold. Box inserts appear to the left and right of the statue, each pointing to an area of the body. The boxes tell the reader the Greek god's measurements and offers exercises to help the real man measure up. For example, the statue's chest measures 52 inches; bench presses with a dumbbell are recommended to achieve this physique. It was this article that first drew my attention to *Men's Health*. If a similar article featuring Barbie as the centerfold were to appear in a women's magazine, it would undoubtedly draw criticism from some readers (for feminist criticism, see Chapkis 1986; Kilbourne 1994, 1995; Piper 1994; Stice and Shaw 1994). Despite criticism, a hegemonic image of a Barbie body type endures in the images in fashion and fitness magazines that target women. In *Men's Health*, similarly, men are told, "[I]n time, you too might be up on a pedestal [just like a Greek god]" (July–August 2000).

Three of the themes in the cover stories and features—"advice for men by men," "general tips," and "fashion"—hint that the magazine's purpose is more than men's health. One of the more interesting articles, coded as advice for men by men, is titled "What I learned from My Butler" (January–February 1999). The author, Joe Kita, relates the useful information that he learned from a seventy-year-old butler in his service whom he describes as "the ideal man." Kita learned skills such as pressing pants, how to decode a place setting, and how to kiss a lady's hand. In a similar vein, the December 2001 issue contains the article "The *Men's Health* Charm School." Men learn that "charm pays attention," "charm appreciates," and "charm remembers." According to the article's author, Hugh O'Neill, "genuine American charm makes colleagues more cooperative, rivals less determined, clerks less rude, and women more willing to take off their clothes and rub up against you" (p. 126). In the same issue, "Are You Half the Man Your Grandfather Was?" by Donovan Webster, suggests that there are "qualities shared by most every other man out there." The "qualities" are persistence, truthfulness, usefulness, being loving, and being in control in terms of anger, attention, or desires. Lessons in etiquette, manners, and morals suggest that the men reading this magazine are insecure. Since *Men's Health* readers are middle class and educated, they are probably in professional, white-collar occupations. As professionals, manners and etiquette are more applicable to daily life than is hunting or

racecar driving tips. The magazine offers fixed answers for men feeling insecure about the changing and confusing gender roles in postmodern consumer society.

Not only do men need advice on how to comport themselves. The cover stories and features also offer advice on consumer products. Presumably, these products help men to put into practice the lessons they learned about etiquette, manners, and morals. Both "general tips" and "fashion," respectively 8 and 7 percent of the cover stories and features, focus on what men should acquire with their money. Articles such as "Snappy Turtles" (October 1998), comparing men's turtleneck shirts by designer and price, and "Slush Puppies (December 1997), comparing boots by designer and price, guide men in the correct consumer choice. Moreover, the articles function as covert advertising, which McCracken (1993:38) defines as "promotions disguised as editorial material or hidden in some other form so that they appear to be nonadvertising." The covert advertisements extend the impact of the purchased advertisements. The article on turtle-necks features items by Eddie Bauer, \$48; Hart Schaffner Marx, \$140; Woolrich, \$24; Perry Ellis, \$125 and \$185; the Gap, \$17; Hickey-Freeman, \$725; TSE, \$325; Polo by Ralph Lauren, \$135; Nautica, \$49; and Ermenegildo Zegna, \$560. The same magazine carries paid advertisements by Perry Ellis (p. 39) and Ralph Lauren (pp. 40, 41; full-page fragrance insert, between pp. 56, 57). Both articles and advertisements reinforce the importance for men of understanding and buying fashion (most men cannot depend on lessons from their butlers).

Buying the correct consumer products extends beyond the purchases men make for themselves. *Men's Health* cover stories and features also help men to make purchases for others. The December 2000 issue provides a list of "perfect gifts for every important person who's lining up with hands out." These important people, in order, are son, father, brother or buddy, wife or girlfriend, mom, daughter, colleagues, and self. For each person the magazine features five gift ideas. Each idea is presented in a 2-inch-by-3-inch box with a photograph of the item, a brief description, a price, and a Web address for ordering. Among the ideal gifts for sons are Microsoft games (\$35) and a Tyco truck (\$60). The ideal gifts for a wife or girlfriend include cashmere socks from Banana Republic (\$22) and a gift certificate from spafinder.com (\$100). Like the fashion articles, these general tips frequently serve as covert advertisements.

The two issues with the reverse cover *Men's Health Guide to Style* clearly illustrate the juxtaposition of paid and covert advertising. In the March 1999 *Guide to Style* is 60 pages; in the September 1999 issue, 56 pages. Covert and paid advertisements are at times difficult to distinguish. The article "Buying Happiness: A 10-Page Guide to Shopping" begins with a full-page color photo of a *Men's Health* editor standing directly in front of the sign for a Target Store, and he carries large Target shopping bags full of merchandise. The article itself is 12 pages long, but dispersed through the feature story are eight full-page advertisements, and the article advertises numerous products. Stories also serve as advertisements. For example, "The Style Problem Solver: The Answers to 18 Clothing and Grooming Riddles" (September 1999) is formatted like a question-and-answer advice column. In this case, it is the author who generates the questions, and the answers always contain a specific product. A vice president for Kenneth Cole answers a

question about appropriate sole thickness for a dress suit, and a Kenneth Cole shoe is pictured. A question about frames for eyeglasses is answered by the president of Morgenthal-Frederics, an eyewear designer, and the text is accompanied by four pairs of Morgenthal-Frederics eyeglasses.

In sum, the cover stories and features serve the primary purpose of covert and sometimes overt advertisements for consumer products that promise to create real men. Enhancing men’s ability to discern the right consumer products—from home gym equipment to formal dinner service—is a key function of *Men’s Health* as an agent of masculine gender socialization. *Men’s Health* offers a vision of masculinity to relieve male anxiety.

“In Every Issue”

Over the four-year period of this study, several standard features appeared in every issue: “Letter to the Editor,” “Ask *Men’s Health*,” “Malegrams,” “To Do List,” “Health Bulletin,” and “Where to Buy.” An analysis of any of these regular features would provide fruitful information about the construction of masculinity, but for this study I elected to confine my analysis to “Ask *Men’s Health*.”

The magazine solicits questions from its readers about “health, fitness, grooming, sex, work, travel, or any other subject [covered]” (see Table 3). The questions

TABLE 3
“Ask *Men’s Health*” Topics

Topics	Examples
Health 27 / 60 (45%)	“Every year my beloved Cubs get knocked out of the playoffs, and every year I feel depressed about it. Should I see a doctor to find out about taking an antidepressant?”
Products 6 / 60 (10%)	“What’s the best kind of underwear to wear when you run? Boxers don’t give any support, but briefs seem to ride up.”
Diet / food 6 / 60 (10%)	“A lot of airlines offer kosher food, and now it’s turning up all over my supermarket. Is kosher food healthier?”
Sex 6 / 60 (10%)	“I got hit in the testicles with a baseball when I was a teenager, and one swelled and turned dark purple for a few weeks. Now I ejaculate too quickly. Is there a connection?”
Fat / weight reduction 4 / 60 (7%)	“Is there a way I can figure out my body-fat percentage without going someplace to have it tested?”
Appearance / surgery 4 / 60 (7%)	“I’m obsessed with my jawline and chin. I think Ernie on <i>Sesame Street</i> has a more defined jaw than I do. Are there any exercises or operations that will help me look less like Ernie and more like Dudley Do-Right?”
Fatherhood 3 / 60 (5%)	“I caught my 10-year-old son surfing the Web for porn. What do I do?”
Hard body 3 / 60 (5%)	“I’ve heard amino acids can help build and repair muscles. Is it worth it to take supplements?”

are posed to a "panel of experts," typically physicians who specialize in a related area. For example, in the July–August 2000 issue a question about the best underwear to wear while running was answered by Michael Manyak, M.D. and professor of urology at the George Washington University Medical Center. A question is usually just one or two sentences long, followed by the questioner's initials and place of residence. Although questions are screened by the editors, they reveal concerns that men have about themselves or their role.

Most notably, the questions reveal that the readers of *Men's Health* are far more concerned with health and dietary issues than with creating a hard body (45% vs. 5% of the questions, respectively). This pattern is in contrast to the cover, which highlights snippets about muscles and fat reduction, and to the pattern of covert advertising in the cover stories and features section, as men are not generally interested in specific products. This focus on health issues may contradict previous research indicating that extreme masculinity is related to poor health practices (Helgeson 1990). Or, as Harrison, Chin, and Ficarroto (1989:296) state, "masculinity may be dangerous to your health." Rather than play the traditional masculine role of being strong and invulnerable and thus not in need of medical advice, the questions may reflect men's anxiety over physiological and emotional wellness. Another explanation for this concern about health issues is that the column may serve as an alternative to seeking medical advice in person. As Royner (1992) noted, one of the major reasons men do not discuss medical problems is embarrassment. What better way to reduce embarrassment about revealing health care fears than through an impersonal health column. Given the long-standing history of this column in *Men's Health*, the questions themselves must be tapping into men's real concerns. Whatever the logic underlying the questions asked, this regular feature of *Men's Health* indicates a shift in masculinity away from the invincibility of the Sturdy Oak to a self-aware and vulnerable postmodern masculinity.

The popularity of this advice column may have led to a more recent *Men's Health* advice column, "Jimmy the Bartender." This column provides advice on "women, work, and other stuff that screws up men's lives." The questions focus on relationships with bosses, girlfriends, coworkers, wives, and fathers. For example, one reader asks, "I have a coworker who's a brownnoser. He gathers dirt on coworkers and runs to the boss. Now he's getting promotions over people who are more deserving. How do we stop this slithering bastard?" The response, confrontation. The answers here typically reinforce the traditional masculine stereotypes: stop whining, take charge, and be a man. Nowhere are specific products mentioned as a solution to the problem faced. The traditionalism of "Jimmy the Bartender" brings to mind longtime advice columns for women such as "Ann Landers" or "Dear Abby."

In a world with changing expectations and rules, advice columns provide a place for men to talk to each other about how to enact masculinity—whether in the context of struggling with newly emerging, shifting, and multiple masculinities or of the desire to relive the hegemonic masculinity of a "real man." Although its advice columns provide more than one vision of masculinity, the dominant construct of masculinity in *Men's Health* is based on consumerism and brand-name products, a feature that is unmistakable in the magazine's advertisements.

Advertisements

According to McCracken (1993:96), the inside front cover, the back cover, and the inside back cover are the most important and costly advertisement spaces in magazines. They therefore warrant detailed analysis for what they reveal, in the case of *Men's Health*, about masculinity today.

Given that the front covers of *Men's Health* show bare-chested models with rippling abs and that the snippets focus on building a hard body, one might speculate that the magazine would be filled with advertisements for gym equipment, protein drinks, and sweatshirts. An analysis of the paid advertisements, however, reveals a contrary pattern.

Advertisements for designer clothing and automobiles clearly dominate (see Table 4). Taken together, these two categories of products represent 80 percent of the prime advertising. Only one product that appears on the key pages, CLIF energy bars, is related to men's health. Advertisers pay the highest cost for ads on the inside front cover. In the issues in my sample, front covers are overwhelmingly devoted to advertising designer clothing (70% of the magazines). Five of the seven inside front covers are trifold advertisements. Four are for sports-related products—designer running shoes and clothing. The remaining three advertisements are for casual designer clothing. Six of the seven advertisements feature male models. Of the eleven models featured in these advertisements, two are women, one of whom is African American, and three are African American men. The remaining six models are white men.

TABLE 4
Advertisements in *Men's Health*

Product	Inside Front Cover	Back Cover	Inside Back Cover
Designer clothing 12/30 (40%)	Tommy Hilfiger (2) Nike (2) Polo (2) Gap	Gap (2) Versace	Ralph Lauren (2)
Automobile 12/30 (40%)	Chevy S-10 (truck) Nissan Maxima (car) Honda CRV (SUV)	Chevy Tracker (SUV) (2) Honda CRV (SUV) GMC Sierra (truck) Chevy Blazer	Saturn (car) Dodge Ram (truck) G.M. Grand Am (car) Nissan Frontier (truck)
Food product 2/30 (7%)			Altoid breath mints CLIF (energy bar)
Gift for a woman 1/30 (3%)			FTD florist
Electronic equipment 1/30 (3%)			Meade telescope
Special feature (reverse cover) 2/30 (7%)		Guide to Style (2)	

The male models in the advertisements are younger and leaner than the front cover models. If these models have bulging biceps, they are well hidden under leather jackets and turtlenecks. In five of the seven clothing advertisements, masculinity is linked to running, baseball, and automobile racing (in the latter case, a Ferrari Formula I designed for winding European road races, not the stock cars associated with American NASCAR on oval stadium tracks). The exquisite architecture and the oil portrait in the background suggest that the sixth advertisement is set at an estate or a museum, thus implying that masculinity is linked to culture and money. The seventh advertisement is without context: an African American man and woman are pictured against a dark blue background; the emphasis is on the clothes rather than an activity. From these advertisements that feature expensive clothing and other products, it is clear that in *Men's Health* masculinity is associated with an upper-middle- to upper-class income level.

Automobile advertisements dominate the back cover (13%) and the inside back cover (17%). The automobiles are shown as more than transportation. Some automobiles are means of escape to nature; for example, some of the ads show automobiles among sequoias or four-wheeling across a desert, thus evoking the sensation of escape, freedom, and play. Other automobile advertisements present the product as a haven of safety that protects the driver from blizzards and lightning storms. The automobiles are the focus of these advertisements. Most cars are parked or shot at such a distance that the driver cannot be seen. When drivers are somewhat visible, they appear to be men. What the advertisements tell us is that automobiles are a man's domain. If a women's magazine like *Cosmopolitan* were to feature clothes washers and dryers on 50 percent of its inside back covers, this would certainly indicate that these are thought of as women's products. Although the masculine role has undergone change since the 1950s, men's connection to automobiles has not, although today it is trucks and SUVs and not cars that real men drive.

Masculinity, as portrayed in *Men's Health* advertisements, centers on what to wear and what to drive. Masculinity implies the ability to purchase the brands of a stylish hard body. In 1997 *Elle* magazine reported that men were spending roughly \$95 billion a year on grooming aids and plastic surgery and that men's designer clothing collections are met with enthusiasm (Kamps 1997:126). The advertisements in *Men's Health* suggest that both clothes and cars serve as status symbols of male success—but only if they are the correct brands. *Men's Health* serves as an agent of masculine socialization by branding products in men's minds; and men's bodies become the walking billboards for brand-name products. Today, branded masculinity shapes men's understanding of themselves and others.

CONCLUSION

Branded masculinity indicates a transformation of men's understanding of masculinity from that presented in Brannon's "No Sissy Stuff" (1976), if not a complete departure from the form of hegemonic masculinity associated with past generations. Men subscribing to publications such as *Men's Health* are being

socialized to “read” masculinity as a consumer product that, as Bordo (2000) also suggests, rests on one’s outward appearance rather than on the traditional male role of production. Branded masculinity is rooted in consumer capitalism wherein profit can be produced by generating insecurity about one’s body and one’s consumer choices and then providing consumers with the correct answer or product in articles and advertisements. Branded masculinity in *Men’s Health* affects the reader by constructing a well-toned body, a fashion sense, and the appearance of financial success as the necessary “products” required by educated, middle-class men today. These are the lessons that our fictional male consumer, Tyler, had absorbed so well as he carefully considered the *right* hair care products to use each morning.

The importance attached to appearance and consumption was, and by some is still, considered a feminine characteristic. Feminists of the 1970s, aware of the harmful physical and emotional toll on women who tried to live up to unrealistic media images, spoke out. They sought to educate women about the ways in which they were being branded by their consumer choices, especially those involving the body as a “project” requiring constant monitoring and managing. Often attributing the source of feminine gender role ideals to patriarchal capitalism, feminists expected both women and men to change the structure. But structural change is difficult. While masculinity is certainly different today than in the prefeminist 1950s, the change for men to branded masculinity is not how feminists once envisioned a gender-neutral future. As Ehrenreich (1989:42) states, “We did not understand that men were changing along a trajectory of their own and that they might end up being less like what we *are* than like what we were once expected to be—vain and shallow and status-conscious.”

A symbiotic relationship exists between the emerging male gender identity and the popular culture images of masculinity in postmodern society. The images, as cultural products, reflect men’s changing understanding of masculinity. And consuming this new form of masculinity as constructed in popular culture may reduce men’s anxieties resulting from a structural transformation to a consumer-based economy. Certainly, in a strategy that parallels women’s magazines use of women’s anxiety about femininity as they began entering traditional male domains, from work to politics, *Men’s Health* is banking on men’s anxieties about masculinity. By constructing new forms of masculinity to sell products, including itself, *Men’s Health* and other men’s magazines generate a profit.

The development of branded masculinity, as evidenced by the growing number of health, fashion, and lifestyle publications for men, provides empirical evidence that a structural change has occurred. The hegemonic masculinity of “No Sissy Stuff” is contested. Masculinity is no longer defined by what a man produces, as in Kimmel’s discussion of Marketplace Manhood, but instead by what a man consumes. The ability to consume any number of styles allows for the construction of multiple masculinities. This study of *Men’s Health* presents but one construct of masculinity, as a stylish hard body, which is targeted at educated, middle-class men. An analysis of a men’s magazine targeting a different socioeconomic group may reveal another specific construct of masculinity; for example, a magazine devoted to stockcar racing may depict masculinity in terms of knowledge about

car performance. However, below the surface difference in the form of masculinity presented, branded masculinity likely remains intact. In other words, in a stockcar-racing magazine, the products one consumes to display one's masculinity (e.g., clothing bearing the brand names of automobiles or racing companies) would be different from those in *Men's Health*, but consumption remains at the foundation of the emerging masculinity of postmodern society. Even Brannon's "real men" must today demonstrate their manliness through consumption of the *right* products.

What appears to be a popular culture filled with multiple constructs of masculinity obscures the structural conditions in which all versions of masculinity are built on a corporate brand. The proliferation of masculinities is stimulated by the capitalist economy, as the most effective sales pitch (i.e., image of masculinity) for each demographic segment of the market is itself constructed. In postmodern society, both femininity and masculinity are shaped by the images incorporated in popular culture. Thus in a society based on consumer capitalism, women and men increasingly share the belief that constructing one's gender identity is merely a matter of purchasing acceptable brand-name products. The multiplicity of masculine gender displays found in contemporary popular culture is exposed as capitalist hegemony in the form of branded masculinities purposely constructed by multinational companies for the purpose of increasing sales and profits at the expense of any authentic understanding of what masculinity really means today.

NOTE

1. The ten randomly selected issues of *Men's Health* in the sample allowed analysis of 102 cover stories and features, 60 "Ask Men's Health" topics, and 30 cover advertisements. All covers revealed a uniform image of masculinity. Thus the inclusion of additional issues would not have added to this portion of the analysis. The goal was to provide what Clifford Geertz (1973) called "thick description," in which the social scientist's role is interpretive—to search for the meaning of a cultural site rather than to provide generalizations. However, analysis of additional men's magazines covering both a longer period than was possible in *Men's Health* and a different readership demographically may yield different results.

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