

IDEALIZED MASCULINITY: IMAGES OF WHITE MEN'S  
BODIES AND WHITE MEN'S IDEAS ABOUT  
MASCULINITY

By

Sally Gehan Mohamed

Submitted to the

Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

of American University

in Partial Fulfillment of

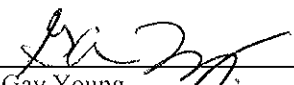
the Requirements for the Degree of

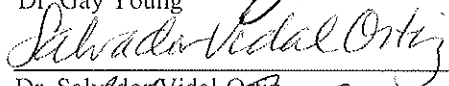
Doctorate of Philosophy

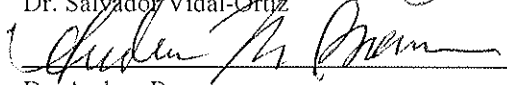
In


Sociology

Chair:

  
Dr. Gay Young

  
Dr. Salvador Vidal-Ortiz

  
Dr. Andrea Brenner

  
Dean of the College

Date

August 22, 2011

2011

American University

Washington, DC 20016

© COPYRIGHT

by

Sally Gehan Mohamed

2011

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

IDEALIZED MASCULINITY: IMAGES OF WHITE MEN'S  
BODIES AND WHITE MEN'S IDEAS ABOUT  
MASCULINITY

BY

Sally Gehan Mohamed

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the ways an idealized – overtly muscular – male body type influences how relatively young, white, middle class USAmerican men, both heterosexual and homosexual, understand the meaning of masculinity. The multi-method approach included analysis of magazine cover images and focus group discussions. A probability sample of 104 cover images appearing between 1999 and 2009 from four men's magazines – two directed at heterosexual men and two directed at homosexual men – was studied using both traditional content analysis and visual analysis. In the spring of 2011, 27 men participated in five focus groups – four groups of straight men only and one group of gay men only. Immediately prior to the group discussions, the men responded to a questionnaire asking about media exposure, exercise habits and ideas about masculinity; these were also the broad topics discussed in the focus groups. Magazines convey the social message that an idealized muscular body is the form against which all men should measure their masculinity. All of the men place physical strength at the core of masculinity although certain contrasts emerged between straight and gay

men's ideas about their own masculinity and their ideas about masculinity in USAmerican society in general. The results confirm existing arguments about the impact images have on social comparisons men make regarding masculinity in USAmerican society. The results also support the notion that heterosexual and homosexual men perceive their masculinity and others' masculinity from a perspective informed by a hegemonic ideal, as put forward and elaborated in the work of Connell, and this ideal includes an idealized version of the male body as a central element. The results extend existing literature by indicating that men are not immune to issues of social pressure emanating from idealized body images.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey life has taken me on has not be the most direct in getting me to my final point in my educational aspirations. There were many stops, restarts, deviations, and lots of bumps and bruises along the way. However, the knowledge I've gained because of all of those obstacles is priceless. There are many people that have been a part of this journey that should be thanked. While there are too many to name here, I hope that you know how grateful I am for your support. There are a few, though, that deserve some formal recognition of thanks.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation chairwoman Dr. Gay Young for her immense support and guidance through what seemed to be a never ending loop of iterations of my literature review and main research question. Without her support through the entire dissertation process, my completion would not have been possible. Also, I would like to thank my two other committee members, Dr. Salvador Vidal-Ortiz and Dr. Andrea Brenner, for their support as well through the process. When the dust finally settled, it was my committee that provided me the constructive feedback and resources I needed to see my research through. Dr. Salvador's excitement about the potential impact of this research within the field of Men's Studies fueled my passion to finish.

A huge debt of gratitude goes to Jacqueline Malone, my template goddess. Without her masterful and wizardly ways with Microsoft Word, I'm sure I would have

thrown a few laptops out of the windows of some very tall buildings. Not to be forgotten, Gabe Anderson and Jennifer Shackelford are owed thanks for helping me recruit men to participate in this study. To my boss Sandra Rogers, a thank you goes to you for your support and for allowing me to take so much time off work to get this done. To my editor and friend Jennifer Pratt, thank you for going with me to recruit, getting me out of the house every once and while, and reading this research study and not falling asleep while you edited my work.

I want to especially thank my family. To my parents, Dr. Talaat H. and Mrs. Betty Mohamed, my siblings, Billy and Lila, my sister-in-law Milena, my niece Kaylee, my nephews, Alex and Nabil, and my best friend Amy McLachlan, thank you for your love and support in my pursuit of higher education. Finally, words alone cannot express the gratitude I owe my twin sister Susan for her love and unwavering encouragement and support in my pursuit of my dream. While this study was not my original idea (the social control of orange cones) that I told her about back in 1995 on a drive home from Disneyland, Susan has always been there to encourage me and to keep me going through all of the obstacles I faced to get this done. Thanks sis, you were my rock. WHO DAT!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	IV
LIST OF TABLES .....	VII
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. METHODS .....	32
3. CONTENT AND VISUAL ANALYSIS FINDINGS .....	48
4. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS .....	85
5. FINDINGS FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS.....	118
6. CONCLUSION.....	147
APPENDICES .....	172
REFERENCES .....	196

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Cover Images Basics .....	49
2. Count of Types of Models .....	50
3. Amount of Clothing on Model.....	52
4. Model's Body Part Shown on Cover .....	54
5. Definition or Absence of Muscles on Model.....	57
6. The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of <i>Men's Health</i> .....	68
7. The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of <i>Men's Fitness</i> Magazine .....	72
8. The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of <i>Out</i> Magazine .....	75
9. The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of <i>Instinct</i> Magazine .....	77
10. Description of Sample.....	86
11. Rank Order of Reasons for Exercising .....	97
12. Men's Responses to Question 17 .....	100
13. Men's Responses to Question 22.....	106
14. Ways Masculinity is Shown.....	112
15. List of Men's Magazines Directed Toward Heterosexual Males .....	172
16. List of Men's Magazines Directed Toward Homosexual Males .....	175



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the ways an idealized – overtly muscular – male body type influences how white USAmerican heterosexual and homosexual, middle-class men understand the meaning of masculinity. It uses R.W. Connell’s formulation of hegemonic masculinity to help analyze an image of masculinity against which men are to be measured. Understandings of men’s individual meanings regarding masculinity are framed in terms of their consumption of images of masculinity and comparisons of themselves to other men.

Through a multi-method approach, a social constructionist lens brings focus to the presentation of masculinity on 104 men’s magazine covers and the ideas about masculinity from 20 white middle class heterosexual men and seven white middle class homosexual men. Masculinity’s meaning is shaped by many different social dimensions; however, it is white men’s perspectives that are the focus of this study. Before analyzing the meaning of masculinity presented by white men, it is important to establish the framework within which this research was undertaken

### Gender norms

Throughout human existence, people have had the social burden of learning the normative standards of the cultures in which they live. A normative understanding of what it means to be a male or a female, masculine or feminine, has existed in all societies. The idea that sex and gender are the same is a misconception. Sex is determined by biological reproductive organs identified as male or female at birth – typically by a medical practitioner. In the instances of intersex, those born with a combination of male and female reproductive genitalia, the medical profession typically insists upon assignment of male or female as the only “natural” options (Kessler, 1990). Gender, on the other hand, is based on abstract, normative representations of masculinity and femininity, which are socially constructed by each society. What is considered a characteristic of the masculine gender role or feminine gender role in one society may not be defined as such in another society. These social constraints of how gender and sex are defined solidify the gendered order of a society. As such, it creates gender-appropriate selection in social arenas like sexual coupling, occupational selection and appropriateness, and parental roles (Schilt, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

These representations allow a particular society to identify people in a gender category when biological sex characteristics are covered by clothing or seem ambiguous. Transgender people are examples of how appearance can be taken as proof of a biological definition of sex (Schilt, 2009). A transgender person is someone who does not self-

identify with the medically assigned sex category given at birth. Some may choose to dress like the gender they identify with and reinforce that dress with an expected gendered behavior. The need to identify with one or the other gender through outside appearance and behavior allows them to participate within the boundaries of the social construction of gender. Therefore, in order to be considered as belonging to a particular gender category, one needs to fit into the socially constructed understandings of what it means to be masculine or feminine in the society in which one lives. When gender characteristics are not straightforward or people blend gender characteristics making it more difficult for others to identify an individual's gender, others in society seek ways to determine gender in order to sustain the gendered order.

In the United States of America's (USAmerican) society, the socially accepted understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman is based on a binary approach to gender: meaning there are two and only two recognized and distinct genders, masculine and feminine (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Each gender has a specific role and prescribed way of behaving that creates differentiation by gender and leads individuals to identify and be identified as either masculine or feminine. This gendered order of men and women is hierarchical, and this hierarchy of men over women pervades all aspects of social life.

With the ever increasing globalization of USAmerican values, one might believe the USAmerican version of masculinity is now universal. However, the leap of defining USAmerican masculinity as a worldwide phenomenon ignores vast cultural differences as well as historical change. Major tenets have typically defined USAmerican masculinity

as either the American cowboy of the Wild West or the corporate man of fast capitalism. This corporate businessman, who has the ability to operate in the global market, embodies a more egocentric attitude and requires no permanent loyalty to anything other than accumulation of wealth (Connell 1998). It is through world exposure to this type of transnational business masculinity that the creation of a world gender order can arise. Some scholars, like R.W. Connell (2005), contend that the transnational business man is currently the hegemonic ideal, the most socially valued form of masculinity, in contemporary USAmerican society. However, even R.W. Connell (1998) admits that the ideal is constantly being challenged by other masculinities.

Masculinity is a fluid concept changing from one generation to the next and varying across cultures as well (Connell, 2005). Yet in everyday life, what is accepted as masculinity is normative and thought of as natural. Social, political and economic changes over time make it challenging for men to figure out how to act masculine in the expected way, even in USAmerican society (Whitehead, 1999). Across cultures and time periods, masculinity has consistently been defined as the oppositional form to femininity. This differentiation is central to maintaining the gendered hierarchy of masculine superiority through patriarchal ideological societies.

### Women's Encroachment on the Elements of Masculinity

The masculine superiority in USAmerican society is rooted in a polarized division of labor in which men are seen as wage-earners and women are the domestic, non-wage

earners (Connell, 1998). In an early benchmark work, Janet Saltzman Chafetz proposed seven key elements of masculinity in USAmerican society. They included the following dimensions and characteristics (1974, 35-36):

1. Physical--virile, athletic, strong, brave;
2. Functional--breadwinner, provider;
3. Sexual--sexually aggressive, experienced. Single status acceptable;
4. Emotional--unemotional, stoic;
5. Intellectual--logical, practical, mechanical, dogmatic;
6. Interpersonal—leader, disciplinarian, individualistic, demanding;
7. Other Personal Characteristics—aggressive, ambitious; proud, trustworthy decisive, competitive, adventurous.

The extent to which men are acknowledged as masculine in the United States (U.S.) is based on how they present and perform the socially relevant characteristics of these dimensions in relation to and amongst others. Certainly, there are some men that are more successful at these dimensions than others. However, in the duality of the gender order in the division of labor, socialization has played a key role in creating the continuum of masculinity and femininity to which men and women are measured.

In the last four decades, more and more women in USAmerican society have become more similar to men in terms of exhibiting the characteristics of six of the seven dimensions of masculinity Chafetz identified. Educationally, Chafetz's intellectual category, thirty-six percent of women in the labor force held college degrees in 2008 compared to only eleven percent in 1970 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). This has

aided women's ability to gain better employment and positions of influence in academic and professional fields, which were previously privileges of men. With their educational achievements and professional attainments, women have made strides in blurring the dominance of men in other areas of social life.

Women's functional achievements have been gained through employment and breaking some glass ceilings that once existed, which limited their career achievements. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009 report, "women accounted for fifty-one percent of all persons employed in management, professional, and related occupations." This provides women the means to become more economically independent as wage-earners, which has traditionally been a part of the masculine aspect of the division of labor. Economic independence brings with it the ability for women to be more sexually aggressive and sexually autonomous. A combination of economic, sexual, emotional, and intellectual autonomy for women creates a social environment that is forced to redefine the division of labor in a more egalitarian structure.

The only aspect of Chafetz' conceptualization which remains as a differentiation of masculinity from femininity is the physical dimension, the body. While there are exceptions, such as women body builders who successfully emulate the muscularity typically found in men, the physical body remains a basis for social differentiation between genders. Female to male and male to female transgender people illustrate the societal need to have two distinct sexes. The process of having surgery to remove identifiable parts of the female body, such as a double mastectomy, in order construct a more masculine body, places emphasis on "doing gender" beyond the superficial. The

taking of hormones and having reconstructive surgery in order to be male is a means to continue the societal separation of two sexes (Schleifer, 2006).

### Research Questions

If the understanding of masculinity centers on physical embodiment as male, a number of questions arise which this research seeks to answer by examining cover images on men's magazines and listening to men in focus groups discuss their ideas about masculinity. Through the consumption of magazines, society can be manipulated or socialized into accepting what is presented as an ideal as the image to attain. As suggested by Erving Goffman, Anthony Vigorito and Timothy Curry state, "...that magazine pictures and advertisements carry significant messages about cultural norms and values, including the norms of gender relations" (1998, 136). It is no surprise to find many researchers have placed more emphasis on women feeling social pressure than men when the main focus of body image research has been on women. With that much emphasis on women, it makes it easier to claim that society holds a higher expectation for women than men to meet a physical body shape due to a higher exposure of the female ideal in the media (Fouts and Vaughan, 2002).

That is not to say that the influence that magazines have had and continue to have on men in society has not gone unnoticed. The limited number of studies on this subject within the field of men's or masculinity studies is beginning to reveal evidence of researchers taking an interest in this medium. I contend that men's magazines have an

impact in promoting an idealized version of men's bodies, which leads USAmerican men to understand their masculinity as centered on their bodies. It is through the social impact of visual imagery and social pressure from others for men to have perfect bodies that ideal or hegemonic masculinity is being transformed to include an idealized version of the masculine body. Through a social constructionist lens I will explore the understanding of masculinity as centered on men's physical bodies.

The questions that will guide this research are: What do men's magazines convey about the meaning of masculinity in USAmerican society? How do men's magazines convey the understanding of masculinity as centered on the body? What is the content of this bodily understanding of masculinity? How do men consume popular images of masculinity? How do men understand masculinity for themselves? To what extent is men's personal understanding of masculinity centered on the body? To what extent do men's understandings of masculinity emulate the idealized masculine body, challenge it, or stand in other more complex relations to it?

As Connell states, "Hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies and desires" (2005, 838). It is through these research questions that understandings of masculinity centered on idealized constructions of the male body will be analyzed.



### Theoretical Approach and Review of Relevant Literature

The following section provides a foundation for understanding the various roles masculinity has and how it functions in society. As Connell states, “Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body of personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting” (2005, 836). The examination of past research in body image, body perception and the interplay of visual imagery in media, specifically magazines, can enlighten the understanding of what influences a social presentation of self in daily life. It is through these self-presentations and social normative expectations that society conceives of our place in the gender ordered society.

Pervasively, men have been overlooked as a subject matter when it comes to the impact that visual imagery has in their conception of what it means to be masculine. Additionally, the physical body is an agent of self-expression and social conformity has not been at the forefront of men’s or masculinity studies. In the words of Connell, “Our bodies are interconnected through social practices, the things people do in daily life” (2009, 67). It is important to analyze the means through which our social understanding of our gendered society is transferred beyond the manifest.

The next section discusses the four types of masculinity as defined by Raewyn Connell. They are hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized. This study will focus on hegemonic, complicit, and subordinate masculinities and how the embodiment of these types of masculinity is expressed through men’s bodies. It examines their

individual understanding of how their masculinity is in relation to others in the social world. Marginalized masculinity is not being selected as a type of masculinity due to the narrow scope of this research. However, it is briefly presented in this chapter for conceptualization of the entirety of Connell's masculinity concept.

## Masculinity

### Hegemony

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has roots in several different fields of thought within and outside of Sociology. It blends together psychoanalytic, Gramscian, critical role theory and feminist thought. While Antonio Gramsci brought the term hegemony into theoretical discourse in 1929, Raewyn Connell was a pioneer when she focused the concept of hegemony by merging the concept of hegemony with masculinity in 1995. In so doing, she opened up the sociological subfield of men's studies and is still the most cited researcher on masculinity.

Connell expanded the scope of gender studies by bringing spotlight on hegemonic masculinity in the arena of gender research. Her concept of masculinity brought in the ideas of power, production and emotion (Beasley, 2005). By doing so, it refocused gender discussions from the dualistic division of gender (of what is not male must therefore be female) to a more in depth and complex conceptualization of gender studies

as a whole. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity has been the topic of much discussion and debate within gender studies of masculinity.

So what does hegemonic masculinity mean? Connell states "Hegemonic masculinity embodies the currently most honored way of being a man, it requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men" (2005, 832). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is based on the assumption that there is a hierarchical structure of gender relations. Due to this hierarchical structure, femininity is subordinated to masculinity in all aspects of society. However, hegemonic masculinity does not mean that all men, because they are men, are equal in their domination in the gendered society. A hierarchical structure of masculinity exists.

According to Carrigan, et al., hegemonic masculinity is a "question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and produce the social relationships that generate their dominance" (1985, 592). A man can be subordinate to another man based on the overarching prejudicial ideology that exists in society, based on race, class or sexual preference. For example, homosexual men are oppressed by the USAmerican view of masculinity due to the hierarchical social construction of power because homosexuality is equated with femininity (Dowsett, 2005).

### Complicit Masculinity

This is not to say that all men are oppressed or submissive because of their race, social class or sexual preference in all situations. Connell states that, “hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity...symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them” (2005, 846). An example of an exemplar is a professional football player. These athletes serve continually as an idealistic symbol of masculinity (Connell, 2005). A very small number of men can ever hope to achieve this masculinity.

More so, there are men who lack the ability to be one of these exemplars of masculinity. These are what most USAmericans would classify as the “average Joe.” He may exhibit some physical characteristics of the heterosexual hegemonic masculine ideal, but does not have any social power or skill that would propel him into a higher standing in the hierarchy of the social structure. According to Connell, “Men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing complicit masculinity” (2005, 832).

Complicit masculine males have an advantage over other masculinities. These men gain advantages of the existence of a hegemonic masculine ideal. For example, a heterosexual man who played on an athletic team in secondary school but not professionally, if they exhibit some physical representation of that hegemonic ideal, they receive the social status and social privileges that accompany that status. At the same time, they recognize their own inability to attain the hegemonic ideal and are powerless to change the inequality that exists in society for them. They continue to take advantage

of the gender inequalities that exists in society and accept them as a normal aspect of life. It can be said that hegemony is most powerful within the context of complicit men and compliant women (Connell, 2005).

### Subordinated Masculinity

Another form of masculinity that stands in relation to hegemonic masculinity is subordinated masculinity. This type of masculinity applies to both heterosexual and homosexual men as well as women in general. Women's subordination is manifest in society through practices such as unequal pay, devaluation of stay-at-home mothers, and "mommy tracks" in corporate America. A man's subordination to another man takes other forms. Therefore, subordination within hegemony for men is best explained through the relation of homosexual masculinity to the hegemonic ideal, which is a heterosexual male. A homosexual man experiences contradictions when defining his masculinity (Connell 1992).

Many people still assume that a homosexual male can be recognized easily by some identifying performance of altered masculinity (Clarkson, 2006). However, this is not true. No social roles or definitions exist during childhood to socialize homosexual men or women, or society at large, in what homosexual masculinity or homosexual femininity is (Connell 1992; Levine 1998). There exists only a heterosexual understanding of masculinity and femininity, and gender role models of those masculinity and femininity understandings continue to be socialized. In the realm of hegemonic

masculinity, gay men are socially defined as effeminate because their sexual preference is male (Levine, 1998). Therefore, a gay man's masculinity becomes subordinate to heterosexual man's masculinity for the mere fact that a gay man's sexual preference is other men, which equates to being feminine (Connell, 1992).

In the hegemonic hierarchy, however, a gay man's masculinity can be subordinate or dominant depending on his social situation. An example of this would be homosexual male athletes. Eric Anderson's (2002) study on gay male athletes found that in order to maintain the hegemonic ideology – and in the face of gay male athletes' fear of repercussions – they would keep their sexuality a secret and participate in subordinating openly gay teammates. Anderson states, "...most of the time...[closeted]gay athletes failed to recognize that their identities were being denied, and they often took part in their own oppression by self-silencing and partaking in heterosexual dialogue" (2002, 870). In this instance, the gay man who remains closeted and participates in subordinating his openly gay peers through anti-gay language, jokes and heterosexual prowess talk enacts the dominate hegemonic masculine ideal. However, those same male athletes, who were eventually outted by their teammates, received repercussions that were often physically brutal because of the perceived social boundary of masculinity that was crossed by lies and deceit (Anderson, 2002).

For some gay men, it means adhering to an extreme form of hegemonic masculinity in order not to be subordinated in society. Levine (1998) points to the hyper-masculine gay male identity, which began in the 1970s. Recent research indicates that this type of gay identity did not disappear in 1984 when AIDS hit the gay community. In

fact, it continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through the use of a homosexual internet chat board Web site to gather his data, Jay Clarkson (2006) found that some homosexual men still adhere to the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in a more extreme way than heterosexual men. They are more hyper-masculine. These men try to reclaim “normative” masculinity through their sexual prowess and boasting (Levine 1998). It is their way of showing off hegemonic masculinity as heterosexual men do with each other.

Some men become extremely masculine in their physique. Martin Levine’s 1998 book entitled *Gay Macho the Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* discusses this hyper masculinity body of the subordinated homosexual male. These men use the gym to build and sculpt their bodies with massive muscles to display the heterosexual hegemonic version of masculinity. However, their attraction to men subordinates them. In order to overcompensate for that subordination they reject the most effeminate gay males. It is through the rejection of flamboyant gay males that they try to distance themselves from being seen as effeminate in the larger society and oppress all that is feminine in order to reduce their subordination in the larger social structure of society.

In addition, clothing becomes a major outward symbol of their need to distance themselves from subordination. By adhering to masculine dominated heterosexual job uniforms, such as the lumber jack or the white collar corporate man, they can inhabit a dominant role in the larger society. However, within those masculine presentations, they form their own inconspicuous forms of homosexual references through symbols to identify themselves to each other (Levine, 1998). By using such objects as bandanas and key chains, they are able to blend in with the larger community and inconspicuously

communicate with each other at the same time (Levine, 1998). However, as Clarkson states, "...even the most masculine gay man's homosexuality denies him the ability to truly achieve the power inherent in hegemonic masculinity..." (2006, 203).

### Marginalized Masculinities

Hegemony, complicity, and subordination do not encompass all men. Some groups of men are marginalized. According to Gordon Marshall, marginalization can be defined as, "a process by which a group or individual is denied access to important positions and symbols of economic, religious, or political power within any society" (1994, 304). Some men are marginalized because of their race. Some men are marginalized because of their class. The way some men move out of marginalization, per Connell, is, "...ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell, 2005, 832). However, this is the exception more than the rule.

An individual can move himself out of a marginalized form of masculinity by achieving great power and status in the larger society. However, he cannot move his entire racial group or social class up to that higher form of masculinity. African-American males are a prime example of a marginalized man. At first blush, an individual is seen on the bases of recognized gender and race (Cheng, 1999). As the hegemonic ideal in USAmerican society is the patriarchal white male, African-American males cannot overcome this color differentiation. However, as a male he will be privileged over women and based on his socio-economic status will be privileged over his own race.



### Criticisms of Hegemonic Masculinity

While hegemonic masculinity replaced sex role theory and categorical models of patriarchy (Connell, 2005), there are areas of criticism of hegemonic masculinity. Some critics believe that the use of hegemonic masculinity has deviated far too much from its original definition. A few critics of hegemonic masculinity believe that the original concept is too ambiguous. At the same time, other critics believe that the underlying concept is flawed because it is not a unifying definition of all that encompasses masculinity. No matter how one views it, the term is still under much scrutiny. Connell admits that there is still not a solidified and concrete theoretical pattern to hegemony (2005, 851). So it appears, sociologically, hegemonic masculinity is still in development after twenty years.

An important critique of the original concept of what embodies hegemonic masculinity claims that it creates a concept that fails to include the differences and exclusions within same gendered persons. Its tenets are centralized around a dualistic definition of male-female relationships (Demetriou, 2001). It excludes same sex relationships. Theoretically, it is conceptualized as a single definition without regard to other types, regions, or cultures causing a more fluid definition of masculinity to be lacking.

These days, hegemonic masculinity has taken on a more general transformation because its use has gone global. Liberal interpretations of the term's original abstract ideas have broadened the scope of what hegemonic masculinity means, which brings systemic problems. If you allow hegemonic masculinity to be so overarching, the

definition becomes, as stated by Beasley, “politically deterministic and defeatist to assume.... ideal/forms of masculinity are necessarily the same as those that work to guarantee men’s authority over women” (2009, 89). Rather than being a term which is a facilitator of patriarchal dominance through the use of various degrees of hegemony and situational class struggles, it becomes a specific cohort of men. This precludes the use of the term with anything other than an actual group of men.

This is exactly what Connell does when she uses the transnational businessman as the culmination of hegemonic masculinity. Through the use of this globalized term to embody the meaning of hegemonic masculinity, Connell is giving a specific group of men global domination and eliminating the complexity of marginalized, complicit and subordinated men as a lived experience. It eliminates the theory of competing masculinities for the hegemonic ideal. As Beasley states, “it is no simple matter to claim that transnational business masculinity...is *the* hegemonic form on a world scale, legitimating men’s dominance...” (2009, 92). It negates social, cultural, and historical influences on the idealized masculinity for future intellectual discourse, which is needed in the discussion of men’s and masculinity studies.

### Athletic Men and Sports

When hegemony is used to analyze men and sports, it is often used with the description of athletes in physical contact sports that have a violent component. Focus on these exemplars of hegemony invokes some critics to take issue with the lack of positive

association with hegemonic masculinity because the term is all too often linked with violence and/or crime. Theorists claim it gives a legitimate scapegoat to men for acts of dominance by justifying, protecting, and /or reproducing the hierarchy of patriarchic systems. However, as a dualistic gender ordered society, USAmerican males have been relegated to a physical expression of masculinity through the emphasis of contact sports as a means to come of age. To that end, hegemony and violence is a likely coupling.

Professional athletes are exemplars of this physical ideal form of hegemonic masculinity. Sports, in general, are for men an arena for defining heterosexual masculinity. Female athletes are required to show that they are not lesbian, whereas male athletes are never assumed to be homosexual (Anderson, 2002). While the social environment is one that illuminates hegemonic masculinity and exclusion of anything effeminate or feminine, it is the physique of the athletes that is pervasive in fashion media.

Connell does acknowledge, “The concept of hegemonic masculinity helped in theorizing the relationship among masculinities and among a variety of crimes...” (2005, 833). To that point, it can be said that hegemonic masculinity is neither a cause of criminal activity nor is its intent to become a scapegoat for any type of disregard for social punishment for those who break social laws. It has merely been used to explain the social phenomenon of crime within the social context of social structures. To remedy the negative association hegemonic masculinity has, researchers need to use the term to theorize other aspects of how society embodies hegemonic masculinity. This research intends to provide such a use.

## Body Image

When one thinks of body image problems, women typically come to mind. Billions of dollars are spent annually on weight loss products and services in the U.S. (Federal Trade Commission, 2002; Melcher and Bostwick, 1998). As a society, we assume that most of the diet consumers are women. Researchers in the social science and medical fields have essentially feminized this issue by focusing their efforts of study on women. The vast amount of data and case studies on women only fuels this notion. Not surprisingly, body image issues are, for the most part, rarely associated with men. There is a relatively small amount of research on men and body image (Morrison, 2004; Markey, 2005; Halliwell, 2003; McCabe .et al. 2003; Hatoum 2004).

So, what about the men? Do we, as a USAmerican society, assume that men are somehow immune to the social pressure to conform to an ideal body image that they are exposed to on television, in a magazine or in a blockbuster movie? Do we assume that women are the only ones who suffer from comparative self-esteem issues? Do we assume only women go to extremes to transform their lackluster bodies into the ideal body image that they perceive the opposite sex wants in a mate?

The limited amount of research on men and body image strongly indicates that the USAmerican society, as a whole, has ignored the ever increasing social pressure for men to measure up to an ideal body image (Halliwell, 2003; Baker, 2005; Hatoum, 2004; Markey, 2005; Morrison, 2004). There are seemingly limitless data points and research conclusions about women and body idealization. So, as a research subject, body idealization is a significant aspect of social inquiry. Even Connell calls attention to

bodies by stating, “Bodies are involved more actively, more intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed. Bodies participate in social action by delineating the course [or courses] of social conduct...” (2005, 851). It goes to conjecture as to why men’s bodies, as a subject of masculinity, have been neglected. This research’s aim is to bring much needed focus on how men’s bodies are the embodiment of masculinity in USAmerican society.

### Propagandizing an Ideal

With the idealization of a specific body type so prevalent in fashion media, the question one must first ask is; how did this begin to seep into the understanding of what masculinity and femininity look like? Past research points to The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company’s 1950s campaign as the source of the foundation of USAmerican society specifying an ideal body form for men and women to aspire to achieve. According to Melcher and Bostwick, the purpose of the campaign, “was designed to convince the public and the medical profession that an ideal weight existed...” (1998, 197). Prior to this, insurance companies were not adhering to a specific weight to insure their policy holders.

It wasn’t until Metropolitan Life Insurance Company began to have to pay out large sums of money due to earlier than expected deaths of their clients that a standard ideal was conceptualized. In order to boost profits and cut loses, the company decided to create an ideal body weight and compel the medical field to accept it as valid in order to

assure the society at large viewed it as a medical necessity and not viewed as profit driven. The propaganda behind this campaign was so successful that the medical field accepted this notion of an ideal body as a means to define health. It launched medical science to prove that it was a scientific fact that men and women should be at a certain weight to be considered healthy.

Over time, women became the target of these health studies and healthiness became solidified with appearance and an ideal body image. As Connell states, "...bodies are both objects of social practice and agents of social practice" (2005, 851). So it is not a surprise that in this day and age, it is not just women being held to an ideal physical form. Men are being exposed to the idea that a key to their success depends on his physical appearance which will afford him hegemonic privilege. If he does not meet or come close to the ideal body image, his masculinity will be marginalized and lose the power that comes with that type of totem of success.

As the weight ideal becomes more extreme and unrealistic propagated the media, in particular the fashion media, the message for most people continues that thinness for women and a toned body for men lead to happiness, acceptability and worthiness (Melcher, 1998). These messages are providing the social pressure to conform to the normative standard of what the normal, desirable masculinity and femininity looks like.

## Media Images

By and large, people are bombarded with media images through daily life. Clips of images on television, in films, and in magazines repeat the ideals of what a male or female body should look like. We become socialized into believing that these images are attainable. To perpetuate that socialization, as a society, blame is placed on individuals for their perceived complacency to noncompliance to this ideal. Jeffery Sobal and Donna Maurer state that “through discursive constraint, society controls a person or group of people...by establishing and perpetuating negative stereotypes that affect their behavior and how they think of themselves” (1999, 31). People are then deluged by the media with ways in which to correct their imperfect bodies.

While some television shows and films are created with a particular viewing audience in mind, the producers of those types of media aim for a general viewing audience to boost viewership. Magazines have the luxury of being targeted modes of gendered socialization. Magazines are specifically designed for one type of audience, whether it targets men who want to learn about cars or women who want to learn about fashion. Their audience is very purposive, which gives them a slightly better potential for influence on society. Interestingly, past research found the overall societal message to attain an ideal body image is the same for men and women. The way that society goes about reinforcing the message is different.

## Magazines

Society sends messages in magazines about achievement of the body ideal by having more food and diet advertisements in women's magazines (Silverstein, 1986) as compared to more fitness-related articles and advertisements in men's magazines (Sobal and Maurer, 1999; Stinson, 2001). However, in both men's and women's magazines, the language has shifted over time from extreme dieting and food restriction messages to healthy eating messages (Sobal and Maurer, 1999). The message, however, is still the same. One should aspire to look like the ideal body image to be socially accepted as a woman or man.

Magazines, in particular, make use of negative images to fault individuals for their deviant body. The images on cover pages showcase the most important image that the producers of the magazines want the viewer to see. Rather than seeing an image of an overweight male in swimsuit trunks, for example, on the cover of a magazine, those images are hidden inside in advertisements for weight loss products. The overweight images of men in those particular advertisements blatantly tell the reader that in order to get the woman of his dreams, a.k.a. the supermodel, he has to have the body of the well-toned male model. That perfect body graces the cover of the magazine, which idealizes a particular body type. This kind of imagery creates and reinforces the social perception of how one's body measures up to another.



### Social Expectations and Socialization

On that note, most research on body image ignores assumptions people have about how they believe others expect them to look (Jacobi, 1994). This lack of research led Lora Jacobi and Thomas F. Cash (1994) to their study on self-perception and the perceived desirable body that the opposite sex wanted. This research examined sixty-nine men and sixty-nine women in college on the discrepancies of perception of what the opposite sex wanted in physique. Jacobi and Cash (1994) concluded that people have absorbed too much of the idealized concept society has for the desirable body. Their subjects proved that society has socialized them into having distorted perceptions about what the opposite sex finds desirable in terms of the physical attributes of someone attractive. All believed in a socialized ideal of what a masculine and feminine body looks like and is what the opposite sex wanted in a mate.

To meet expectations of what it means to be masculine in USAmerican society presented on the covers of men's magazines, a man may subject himself to many different strategies. He may do whatever is necessary, regardless of self-harm or lifelong injury to live up to the social pressure to conform (Forbes, 2001). USAmericans are shocked that some men are using medical science as a means to speed up their ability to match or sustain that ideal body image in the twenty-first century. According to Gordon Forbes, 'male body dissatisfaction is a major factor in the widespread use of anabolic steroids' (2001, 462). It goes to show that some men are just as susceptible as women to feel the need of perceived social acceptance, e.g. to have the perfect body to fit in with their peers.

This concept of peer social acceptance is prevalent in adolescence. While issues of this kind have already been well established for women and girls in other studies, studies with adolescent boys is deficient. However, the research that has been done thus far provides some interesting relationships between magazines, the attainment of the idealized body image and adolescent boys. For example unlike adolescent girls, Marita McCabe and Lina Ricciardelli's 2001 research found that boys are more likely to use weight gain as a means to achieve the male ideal image. Also, they found that these boys were less likely to attribute outside social influence, such as magazine images, as a contributing factor to their body shaping regime. They concluded that we socialize boys to discount the influence of media on their achievement of a particular body physique.

Is it correct for McCabe and Ricciardelli to conclude that we are socializing our boys and men to discount the influence of magazines and other forms of media have on creating an atmosphere of reinforcing a male ideal body? Renee Botta's 2003 study of the relationship magazines had with adolescent body image and eating problems is supports this notion. Her research shows a negative social relationship between boys and magazine images. The boys openly rejected the images when among peers. However, Botta's (2003) research also found that the more boys criticized the male model's bodies the more body image and eating disorders those boys had. In her words, "When adolescent boys compare themselves to the muscular athletes and models in sports magazines, they are less satisfied with their bodies" (2003, 396).

So, it appears that socialization of an ideal body type, which the hegemonic ideal includes, is occurring. Is it just through magazines or is there something or someone else

that is reinforcing the dominant masculine body? In a 2003 follow up study by McCabe and Ricciardelli, they examined the effects of body changes of adolescent boys and girls and their body image. It was found that, while the social message for boys to build muscle was strong in influencing weight gain, overall, it was influence of parents that impacted the changes in body to meet an ideal. So, the socialization from parents and peers play a role in the perpetuation of the dominant masculine ideal body. The exposure to images in magazines and television of culturally accepted images of ideal celebrity bodies has a negative effect on self-esteem in older adolescent males and females (Morrison, 2004).

Past research does not bode well for the collegiate-aged members of society with their exposure to magazine images. Both Gordon Forbes' 2001 study on body dissatisfaction and Ida Hatoum's 2004 study on the relationship between magazines and body image found a significant influence that magazines have on self-perceived body acceptance in collegiate-aged males and females. Each found evidence that both men and women had self-perceptions that their bodies were not in the physical form they should be. Hatoum's results presented further evidence that the men in her study were dissatisfied with their body enough that they wanted to change their physique to meet an ideal weight they felt they should be. Interestingly, Hatoum study showed that, "those who had skimmed through more male-directed magazines in the previous month clearly demonstrated elevated concern about every aspect of muscularity and also general fitness" (2004, 404).

Clearly, men's magazine images are reinforcing an idealized male body image throughout a man's life. Men are feeling that social pressure to conform by the constant barrage of images that they see on the magazine covers. This is evident in Emma Halliwell's (2003) study on men and women's body image as they age. What she found was that as women age they are concerned with their outside appearance. On the other hand, men were concerned with the physical abilities of their body rather than their appearance. This concern, to have the virile strength of a young man's body, indicates that the images men are being exposed to in magazines are creating a culture that pressures men to attain and keep an ideal body as women have been pressured since the 1940s (Forbes, 2001).

The social stigma attached to not meeting the physical ideal can be so great that people have to create coping mechanisms to deal with the social ramifications. What Sobal and Maurer (1999) found, in *Weighty issues: fatness and thinness as social problems*, is that people fall into two modes of thought. They either have the ability to deal with their body image or they become consumed by it. They concluded that most people have some ability to accept the trials and tribulations that go along with not having the ideal body and facing negative stigma. They become complacent with their body as it is and do not bother trying to achieve what they perceive as unattainable. However, some people become so consumed by that ideal body image and their inability to attain it that they have repercussions of suicide just to end the social verbal abuse they receive or perceive to receive by others. It is all to seek the approval and acceptance of their peers and society at large.

### Past Studies on Men's Magazines

With all of this past research on men and body image as it relates to magazine images, one might ask the question: is there a particular magazine that has more influence on men and boys than others? Over the last twenty years, print media has seen an influx of men's lifestyle magazines into the market place. The 1990s experienced an explosion of men's magazines that hit the market across the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Due to that, the market no longer has the idea that men are just interested in car and sports. The influx of men's magazines in health, fashion, lifestyle and magazines targeting men under twenty-four has changed that stereotype (Jackson, 2001).

Overall, the most studied men's magazine appears to be *Men's Health*. It has been the focus of such studies as Paul Crawshaw's (2007) study of a two year period on its promotion of health, and Arran Stibbe's (2004) study that claims that the magazine promotes bad health behavior in its readers. Rather than promoting real medical health, according to Crawshaw, *Men's Health* focuses on, "...the construction of the body as a signifier of success and masculine identity..." (2007, 1609). Stibbe states that *Men's Health* magazine promotes little or no exercise except to build arm muscle mass (2004). It uses blatant promotion of eating red meat and junk food that is loaded with high fat and eating no vegetables as a way for a man to get healthy. Crawshaw (2007) claims that what the magazine is really doing is just promoting the dominant masculinity in the form of promoting the ideal male body physically. Further Stibbe's research found identifiable language used by the magazine to promote avoidance of any domestic behavior that would be considered effeminate. Its presumptuous authoritativeness as a men's health

magazine further fuels the dominant masculine ideal body by equating manliness to muscle mass.

One of the most notable and the most referenced examination of a men's magazine is Lauren Davis' 1997 book entitled *The Swimsuit Issue and Sport: Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports Illustrated*. Her research into *Sports Illustrated* magazine was centered on the swimsuit issue that is published by the magazine annually. What she found was that the magazine as a whole did little to aid in the end of the heterosexual male dominant ideology. It shows a very limited quantity of women's sports and women athletes in general. A majority of the sports and athletes that are shown in *Sports Illustrated* are masculine sports and males with physical prowess. Again, this reinforces the socialization of the hegemonic masculine ideal through a physical body image through its promotion in a men's magazine.

As men read and purchase these magazines, it creates a consumer vehicle for socialization of this idealized body. By creating a male consumer, it creates a means to reorganize consumer tastes and stimulate the US American capitalist market. Kenon Breazeale explains, "Only by sophisticated methods of manipulating and reconceptualizing consumer audiences... could corporate America revive and prosper" (1008, 2). It was through his (1994) study of *Esquire* magazine that he showed how this particular magazine transformed the understanding of who was a viable consumer and transformed consumerism from a feminine trait to a masculine trait as well. They argued against status quo and stood behind the rhetoric of being a men's magazine, which change the industry thinking.

### Outline of the Chapters

Chapter one has discussed relevant literature and past research on the subjects such as hegemonic masculinity, propaganda of an idealized male body, influence of magazines and the identification of the research question. Chapter two presents the methods used to conduct the research. The analysis of the manifest content and the subtext of a sample of images of men on men's magazine covers is presented in Chapter three. The analysis of the reception of such images among a purposefully selected group of college aged and young professional men who responded to a questionnaire and participated in focus groups is presented in Chapters four and five. A discussion of the results and conclusions are presented in Chapter six. The intent of this research is to broaden the understanding of masculinity and the consumption of masculinity by men in USAmerican society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODS

#### Strategies of Observation and Analysis

This research study uses a multi-method approach to examine the issue of the bodily understanding of masculinity in USAmerican society. Through the utilization of qualitative and quantitative methods, this study investigates the following: What do men's magazines convey about the meaning of masculinity in USAmerican society? How do men's magazines convey the understanding of masculinity as centered on the body? What is the content of this bodily understanding of masculinity? How do men consume popular images of masculinity? How do men understand masculinity for themselves? To what extent is men's personal understanding of masculinity centered on the body? To what extent do men's understandings of masculinity emulate the idealized (or "hegemonic") masculine body, challenge it, or stand in other more complex relations to it?

This research makes use of content analysis, visual analysis, and focus groups in conjunction with a questionnaire to answer these questions. A visual analysis method is used in combination with traditional content analysis as a means to interpret understandings of masculinity conveyed on magazine cover images. In order to capture



the perceptions and attitudes towards images of masculinity presented in the media generally, focus groups and a pre-focus group questionnaire were conducted. The use of a questionnaire and discussion in the focus group allows the researcher the advantage of comparing what participants said and how they behave in the group and what they say on the questionnaire. These two methods of collecting data may show a difference in the public and private persona of a participant. This multi-method use of strategies of data collection enriches the findings of the study.

One of the qualities that qualitative methods bring to research is incorporation of researcher bias. This bias threatens the validity of the research as one could argue that non-objectivity taints the results. However, most research is not without bias.

Qualitative research uses researcher bias as an asset rather than a detriment. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, this researcher acknowledges that personal bias existed and played a factor in interpretation of data. Through the use of the questionnaire data, which can be quantified, some research bias was minimized through that qualitative analysis.

Normally, interrater reliability is discerned through the use of multiple coders for whom a reliability factor is assessed based on the level of similarity that the coders have matched. Due to this research being conducted by a sole researcher, interrater reliability is a controlled limitation to the reliability of the coding. Detailed operationalization of the coding criteria was instituted for consistency and clarity in the content analysis data collection. A pilot test with a sample of magazines was used to test the coding and

understanding of the criteria. A pilot test of the questionnaire was used to insure the questions captured data accurately.

### Limitations of the Research

All research methods have limitations. Focus groups, questionnaires, content analysis and visual analysis bring their own set of limitations to this research. These are discussed previously in this chapter. However, by using a multidimensional research design to create triangulation, the researcher has the opportunity to offset some of those limitations that each strategy brings to the research.

Through the restriction of collecting only certain demographic data on questionnaires, one misses the opportunity to make inferences about their participants' viewpoints from something that might be influencing them more than the categories collected. This research does not inquire about religion or income. These two factors can play a significant role in a person's life and can affect their opinion. The use of a focus group with the questionnaire has the potential to bring forth this influence through conversation.

The exclusion of all other members of society narrows the application of the results of the research. This study purposively excludes other races other than white, as well as all women. It is through this exclusion that the researcher attempts to control for any cultural, racial and gender influences found in the larger society that shape how a

person interprets masculinity. By not collecting information from these groups, it allows the research to focus on the dominating racial group in the U.S.

The final limitation of this research is the reliability and the ability for replication. It would be feasible to repeat the study using other men's magazines and other focus groups. The results from which could be used to validate or refute the findings in this research.

### Content Analysis

Content analysis allows for the examination of social artifacts through a quantitative and objective methodology of research through coding. In this research the unit of analysis is the magazine covers. Since content analysis deals with more of the "what" aspect of research, the coding of the content of the magazine covers is based on two key factors that are the following: whether a human figure is present on the cover and what the words are that present on the cover.

If there is a human figure on the cover, data is collected in the following coding categories: Number of human figures; Gender of image (Male/Female); Clothed, partially clothed or unclothed; Part of body shown (1. Full Body, 2. Head shot, 3. Head to waist, 4. Head to knees, 5. Head to mid-thigh, 6. Head to ankle, 7. Head to mid-crotch, 8. Head to mid-shoulder, 9. Head to mid-chest, 10. Head to shoulder, 11. Other); Does the body show: defined muscles on unclothed body part, defined muscles under clothes on body part, absence of muscles on unclothed body part, absence of muscles under clothes on

body part. Collectively, these items are collected and used to create quantifiable descriptive statistics about the magazines.

Words can create a certain perception of how the image is to be viewed. So, it is important to collect the words that appear with the images because the entire cover is being viewed and interpreted by the reader. In this research, the words on the cover were coded to see what words the producer of the magazines used to capture a reader's attention. The capture of specific words, key themes and general observations was used for visual analysis. Data is collected in the following coding categories for words on the magazine covers: picture image description, words on cover that are the largest font, words on the cover that are the second largest font, general message on the cover by the collective words, descriptive observation of the image. The detailed coding scheme is in Appendix C.

### Visual Analysis

Visual analysis has been used in many different fields of science to gather or enhance information. Its use in the field of sociology, however, has been met with anxiety over the integrity of the image, the fallibility of the process of selection and that it is not scientific (Collier, 1979; Cheatwood and Stasz, 1979; Prosser, 1996). Imagery is a very powerful tool in conveying information. The photograph is, per Jon Wagner, "an image selected from all there is to see, framed in a distinctive and at times peculiar

manner, and processed...according to a set of highly manipulable techniques” (1979, 147).

Visual analysis allows for interpretations of meaning in an image that cannot be captured in other means of data collection. Rather than looking at just the manifest or surface image as in conventional content analysis, visual analysis attends to the meaning of what is presented. One of the strengths of visual analysis is that when images are put together they can show cultural and social structure references, rather than a quantifiable numerator (Collier, 1979). It considers not only the picture, but also the viewer and the photographer (Wagner, 1979; Harper, 1994). It allows a researcher to ask questions such as: is the viewer in public when he accesses the image? Is the viewer at home alone? Is the image meant for the viewer to be alone or with others when looking at the image? What does the image convey from the point of view of the photographer?

In this study, visual analysis is used to generate more nuanced data about the body images on men’s magazine covers. It is essential to look beyond what is manifest in order to truly use one’s sociological imagination to uncover the impact the images have on not only the individual viewer but the society as a whole. It is important to expand the way in which sociologists examine the world; particularly in the advent of a more technologically dependent society. As we connect more through our technology and less face to face, the picture/image is becoming increasingly more important to society today. How we represent ourselves and others becomes a way of informing others about who we are as individuals and as members of a larger society. The perception of others becomes

an important part of how we define ourselves in terms of masculine or feminine, regardless of the degree to which we choose to conform to societal constraints on gender.

The use of visual analysis and content analysis does possess potential issues regarding bias and validity. Visual analysis is based on subjective interpretation of the data and inferences are made by the researcher who has their own biases and social experience that can cause prejudice in selection as well as interpretation. However, analysis of a group of images randomly selected can reduce prejudice of aesthetics and contribute to the statement of the collective group (Wagner, 1979). By systematic random selection of the magazines, this researcher reduced that aesthetic prejudice for this study.

### Focus Groups

Focus groups allow this researcher to gather perceptions and attitudes about a topic through the collective discussion of a group of individuals who share a particular characteristic. Also, it allows this researcher to capture data in a social environment, which some researchers believe to be similar to a setting that would occur in real life (Hollander, 2008). It is a simple means to explore a topic rather than explain it. The heart of this focus group was to find out how each man interprets the meaning of the societal understanding of masculinity and how he chooses to manifest that meaning. Through the use of the focus group and a pre-group questionnaire this is explored.

An integral part of any focus group is the facilitator/moderator. The moderator of a focus group has the advantage of choosing to allow the group to be either self-directive in dialogue by blending into the background and having a member of the group facilitate the group discussion to allow a more natural interaction to occur or be an active moderator who introduces specific questions and insures the discussions do not stagnate or go on too long or. As a self-directed group, a researcher has less control of what topics are discussed at length, which might be something irrelevant to the research topic. This is an important aspect of focus groups because moderators have the ability to keep the participants on track. This researcher uses an active moderator in these focus group discussions because the topic of masculinity is so abstract that the group needed to be directed in an efficient way to get the participants to discuss the more important aspects of the term to answer particular questions this researcher was aiming to have answered.

The overarching question for the focus group is exploring what masculinity means to these participants. By interjecting well thought out questions, the moderator focuses the group on very specific topics in a very quick manner. For example, the moderator can pose questions to the participants that involve more thought provoking answers to move the discussion along. Questions such as: what source does their meaning of masculinity come from? Is it something that they receive exclusively from the media or does the meaning come from a variety of sources that collectively allow them to understand the meaning of masculinity in the USAmerican society? What impact do the media play in their perception of what being masculine means? By avoiding yes

and no type of questions, it provided more of an insight into what influences these participants. The focus group questions are listed in Appendix E.

Prior to participation in the group discussion, focus group participants take a questionnaire. By asking the participants to respond to a questionnaire before they engage in group discussion, it allows this researcher to assess whether there was “groupthink” (Janis 1972), meaning answers are a consensus of the group rather than unique to the individual, influencing participant discourse. The questions on the questionnaire were similar to the questions that were asked in the focus group discussion. The questionnaire consisted of thirty-one force choice questions and five open-ended list type questions. The questionnaire is in Appendix D. It aides the participants by getting them in the right frame of reference to actively participate in the group discussion.

Focus groups’ limitations center on the participants. With this type of methodology, a researcher relies on what the participants say. It is recorded and taken at face value. A researcher doesn’t truly know if the participants are disclosing the full truth of their opinion or if they are influenced by the group (Hollander, 2008). However, the benefit of focus groups is to capture that very dynamic between the members of the group. Group members may influence each other. There may be an underlying pressure to appear in agreement with rather than a dissention from answers given. As Hollander states, “Participants may exaggerate, minimize, or withhold experiences depending...” (626, 2008). This is not something that a researcher can capture with one-on-one interviews.



Another issue researchers face with focus groups is the notion that the data gained from these groups are not generalizable to the larger population. One is better able to describe the group than translate the data into something that describes the larger society because the group may not be composed of a true representation of the larger society. Through the use of focus groups, the validity of the researcher's interpretation will be increased as the meaning gained from the magazine covers is explored by the focus group participants. The use of standardized questions and standardized operational definitions in the content analysis will support the reliability of the analysis. Some researchers find differences between groups problematic, and groups are difficult to assemble because of time or location of the focus group.

### Sample Selection

#### Magazine Covers

The Association of Magazine Media (MPA), an non-profit organization representing approximately 275 U.S. and International publishing companies, states that there were approximately 20,638 magazines in publication in 2009 in North America; of those 7,110 magazines were consumer magazines (2010, 81). Borders Bookstore, a nationwide bookstore associated with Amazon.com, an online bookstore, claims to carry 4,881 magazines in its stores nationwide (Borders, 2008). With a population size of over 20,000 magazines currently in print and due to the lack of a consistent industry standard

of what constitutes a men's magazine, purposive sampling was done to select specific magazines for this study.

Through a cross listing of magazines from Borders bookstore, the listings of the top 100 magazines ranked by the average total single copy circulation and subscription circulation according to the Association of Magazine Media (MPA), a list of heterosexual and homosexual men's magazines was created. These lists can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. To further narrow down the list of men's magazines compiled, this researcher has additional criteria the magazine needed meet in order to be included in the sample. They were the following: published in the U.S., printed in the English language; was in print during the period of 1999 to 2009; defined by the publisher as an annual magazine; had a main target readership of white males; publisher stated it was specifically targeting a heterosexual or homosexual male as its audience; the target audience was between the ages of 18 and 34 years old; the cover of the magazine had male figures more often on the cover than female figures. An annual magazine was defined as having at least 12 monthly publications per year.

Magazines were excluded from the sample based on a second set of criteria. Quarterly publications were excluded from the sample because these magazines have limited exposure to the target audience with four magazines produced a year. Foreign publications are excluded from this sample. Foreign magazines were defined as those that were printed in a language other than English or those that were printed exclusively outside of the U.S. Pornographic magazines were excluded from the sample. Magazines

that had a target audience of women or persons under the age of 18 were excluded from the sample.

The magazines selected from the criteria listed above were the following: *Men's Health*, *Men's Fitness*, *Instinct*, and *Out*. There were over 76 magazines directed toward a heterosexual male readership in the sample population. *Men's Health* magazine and *Men's Fitness* magazine publishers specifically claimed a targeted heterosexual male readership between the ages of 18-34 and met all the criteria needed to be selected. There were less than 30 magazines currently in print that were available for the sample of magazines directed toward a homosexual male readership. *Instinct* magazine's publisher specifically targeted homosexual male readership and met all the other criteria to be selected. While *Out* magazine publisher stated it targeted homosexual and lesbian readership, it was included in the sample because it met all the criteria except one. None of the other magazines in the list of homosexual directed readership met as many criteria as *Out* magazine.

A random sample of 104 magazines covers over a 10 year period to do the content analysis and visual analysis is created by the researcher. A systematic sample with a random start between one and 12 and using an interval of five is used to pick the issues of the magazines to be in the sample. The subset sample of the magazines resulted in the following months and years to be selected for each magazine: May 1999, October 1999, March 2000, August 2000, January 2001, June 2001, November 2001, April 2002, September 2002, February 2003, July 2003, December 2003, May 2004, October 2004, March 2005, August 2005, January 2006, June 2006, November 2006, April 2007,

September 2007, February 2008, July 2008, December 2008, May 2009, and October 2009.

A random subset of six magazine covers is used in the focus groups to direct the discussion about masculinity in the body. Each focus group views magazine covers that were directed toward their sexual orientation. It is the intent of this researcher to minimize the risk of offensive images through the exclusion of women's magazines and other types of magazines in the focus group sessions. Therefore, this researcher created a homogenous sample of covers to allow the participants to focus on the images specifically targeted to them. The magazines selected may not have been a true representation of what the participants view on a regular basis. However, for the purposes of this research, the sample was appropriate.

The use of these magazine covers for this study does bring with it some limitations and strengths to the research. Exclusion of women's magazines, pornographic magazines, hunting magazines, etc. runs the risk of not capturing a complete sample of magazines the participants may be exposed to in their daily lives. What it does, however, is focus the participant's attention and this researcher's attention on an area of masculinity research that targets a social understanding of how the white body plays a part in defining masculinity in the U.S. The targeting of magazines with a specific readership of white males limits the ability of this study's generalizability to other racial and ethnic groups. However, the strength of this study's exclusion of these other factors and groups allows the research to focus in on the influence of the dominating white racial group in the USAmerican population.

### Focus Group Subjects

This study involves five focus groups. Group size ranged from six to eight participants in each session resulting in a sample size of 27 participants. Twenty men are heterosexual and seven men are homosexual. Participants are recruited from area gyms, universities, bars and social groups through snowball sampling from the Washington D.C metro area, which includes parts of Virginia and Maryland. The use of key informants, such as membership managers, social club presidents, and bar staff is used in recruiting targeted participants. Snowball sampling is chosen because of the very specific category of men with which this research is being conducted.

This research's intent is to focus on a select category of members of society and measure unquantifiable aspects of behavior and social influence. Therefore the selection of participants has to be purposive. Participants are selected to participate in the study if they were male, self-identified as homosexual or heterosexual, between the ages of 18 and 34, white, and self-identified as middle class, with at least a high school education. While there are not any physical restrictions, recruitment from gyms is deliberate to insure that some of the participants are active in changing the shape of their body to a more muscular physique.

Because whiteness is part of masculinity found in the production of U.S. magazines, it requires these specific criteria and placed other cultures out of the scope of this research. This researcher chooses to focus on white middle class men because they form the dominant group in society, which has vast control of the social institutions. These social institutions produce and perpetuate collective social understandings about

masculinity in the U.S. Thus, the reason the men have to be born and raised in the U.S. is to try and hone in on those with a lifetime exposure of U.S. media.

### Significance of the Research

As a researcher, one has the power to delineate knowledge. The significance of this research is to broaden the understanding of the agency of gender and bodies in men's and masculinity studies. By analyzing a medium that has the potential to impact the lives of every USAmerican, this research can make a difference in the way we, as a society, take for granted the images that we allow ourselves to consume. By bringing forth an examination of the social understanding of men to conform to an idealized body image in order to be viewed as masculine, it brings into focus a relatively new area of research in Sociology that deserves expansion.

Not only is there a lack of research in this area of men's and masculinity studies, but the field of Sociology must begin to examine men when it comes to body image and masculinity, as systematically as they examine women, body image and femininity. This research is creating a baseline from which other researchers can expand and improve upon. Through the purposive selection of white men, it begins the deconstruction of the hierarchal social system from which understandings of masculinity are created, taught and learned. Without a baseline, the importance of this area of inquiry is overlooked.

Through the comparison of heterosexual and homosexual white men, the concealed whiteness and heterosexual interplay with masculinity is put into focus. While

past research has focused on one particular sexual orientation when examining masculinity, the comparison of heterosexual and homosexual men has not been combined into one study. This study accomplishes that and creates a stepping stone for future research.

The question of what overarching, mainstream ideal body image being promoted to men in the U.S. of America and how it affects them is an important area of research. This researcher hopes to extend the interest in the analysis of the social pressure on men to live up to an ideal masculinity via images seen in the media. The strength of using a multimethod approach in this study is that it brings the perspective of the researcher, the perspective of the individual men and the perspective of the group of men into view. Those different perspectives can then be analyzed and compared with each other to deepen the understanding of masculinity and how the messages that the media produce are consumed. The next three chapters each focus on one of these methods of analysis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONTENT AND VISUAL ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The findings of the content analysis and visual analysis of 104 magazine covers are presented together in this chapter. Due to the enormity of the data, the chapter is subdivided into five sections. The first section pertains to the content analysis findings for the overall sample. The second section details the visual analysis findings for the overall sample. The third section presents specific content and visual analysis for *Men's Health* magazine. The fourth section covers content and visual analysis for *Men's Fitness* magazine. The fifth section deals with the content and visual analysis found for *Out* magazine. Finally, the sixth section reviews the content and visual analysis for *Instinct* magazine. A sample of covers from one of the magazines is contained in Appendix F.

#### Content Analysis - Overall findings

##### Description of Cover Images

In order to assess the depiction of masculinity on magazines, it is important to capture a sample of images to which these men have access. Through the examination of



the manifest representations, one can get a general sense of what the producers of the magazines associate with masculinity.

The 104 magazine covers in the total sample are very homogeneous as a group. All of the magazine covers show at least one human figure. This is the norm with 92 of the covers having only one human figure presented. Twelve of the covers have two or more humans shown. The largest number of human figures found on one cover is 11. Ninety percent of the magazine covers have a white model. While only 14 magazines out of the 104 in the sample have a race other than white on the cover, 13 of those models are male; 11 African-American men, 1 multi-racial male and 1 Hispanic man. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the basic findings for the cover images.

**Table 1**  
**Cover Images Basics**

Item	Operationalized Finding	N / Percent
Human Figure	Yes No	104 / 100% 0%
Number of figures	1 human figure 2 human figures 3 human figures 9 human figures 11 human figures	91/ 87.50% 10/ 9.62% 1/ .96% 1/ .96% 1/ .96%
Gender of image	Male Female Both	88 / 84.62% 5 /4.81% 11 / 10.58%
Race of human figure	White Black Hispanic Multi-racial	90/ 86.53% 11/ 10.57% 1/ .96% 2/ 1.92%

Of those human figures found on the covers, 88 of the covers have a male model only. Only 11 of the covers have both male and female models on the cover. However, the female is a secondary figure to the male and is shown in a small insert on all 11 of those covers. Five of the magazine covers have a female model only on the cover. These eight female model covers are found equally on *Men's Fitness* magazine and *Out* magazine. However, the women on the *Men's Fitness* magazine are either nude or in a bikini, which can be seen as a direct marketing strategy to entice heterosexual males to look at or purchase the magazine. *Out* magazine has the women shown from their head to their shoulders and appear fully clothed, which has no sexual enticement for the viewer. The only enticement for a viewer with the four *Out* magazine female models is the draw of the particular celebrity shown on the cover.

The use of celebrity figures or professional athletes on the cover of the magazines in the sample is varied. Table 2 shows the frequency of how often celebrities or athletes are used as cover models on the magazines in the sample. *Out* magazine has

**Table 2**  
**Count of Types of Models**

Magazine	Celebrity	Professional Athlete	Unknown Model
<i>Men's Health</i>	10	3	16
<i>Men's Fitness</i>	7	9	17
<i>Out</i>	39	1	6
<i>Instinct</i>	8	0	19

\*These counts include the small insert photos. Some covers have more than one cover model presented increasing the count.

the highest number of celebrity or professional athlete models shown on 19 out of its 26 covers in the sample. Two of *Out* magazine's covers have 9 or 11 people on one cover, which increases the count. *Men's Health* magazine has 11 of its covers show celebrity or professional athletes. *Men's Fitness* magazine has 14 covers out of its 26 in the sample show celebrities or professional athletes. Celebrities are found on only eight of *Instinct* magazine's covers. What is significant about *Instinct* magazine is that none of the covers in the sample of *Instinct* magazine were professional athletes. Rather, they used celebrities that are either film actors or reality television stars. With this lack of athletic imagery, one could surmise that *Instinct* magazine's believes its readership has no interest in professional sports or athletes.

In sum, the magazine covers in this sample show that the producers of these magazines are focused on a white male to represent their brand. It is through the purposive selection of these white males as cover models that the magazines are reinforcing the social perception of whiteness as being an overarching cultureless representation of the USAmerican society (Perry, 2001). The use of celebrities on the covers brings to the forefront the exemplars of dominant masculinity and/or whiteness.

### Clothing on Body Parts

Comparatively, the four magazines create a continuum of conservatism to liberalism of how they showcase the model's bodies with or without clothes. Overall, 51 percent of the covers have the models fully clothed. Forty-three percent magazine covers have the

models partially clothed. Only six percent of the magazine covers have a completely unclothed model. This information is captured in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Amount of Clothing on Model**

Is the figure	Number of covers	Percentage of sample
Completely clothed	53	50.96%
Partially clothed	45	43.27%
Completely Unclothed	6	5.77%

*Out* magazine is the most conservative of the four magazines in regards to showing an unclothed or partially clothed body. It has the most instances, 21 out of 26 magazines, where the models are completely clothed. Of the three *Out* magazine covers with more than one model, there was opportunity for the producer of the magazine to deviate from conservatism and have unclothed or partially clothed bodies. However, all three of these covers have the models fully clothed or just have head shots.

When it comes to showcasing the model's bodies with clothing or without clothing, *Men's Health* magazine and *Instinct* magazine are more equal to each other and fall in the middle of the continuum. *Men's Health* magazine has 16 of its covers with models completely clothed, which leaves 10 covers with models partially clothed or completely unclothed (although the entire body may not be shown). Of the three instances where there is a second picture placed as a small insert on *Men's Health* magazine, two of the inserts are of women's heads and one is an insert of a male fully

clothed. *Instinct* magazine only covers 12 of its models with complete clothing and leaves 15 to partial clothing or no clothing at all.

On the opposite end of the clothing continuum from *Out* magazine is *Men's Fitness* magazine. In this case, the cover models on the *Men's Fitness* magazines are only completely clothed in seven out of 26 covers. The number of partially clothed or nude models goes up if you include the six smaller insert pictures. Of the insert pictures, two are women nude from the waist up covering their breast with their arms; one is a male model partially clothed; two are head shots of women; and one is a completely clothed male inserted next to a completely unclothed cover model woman. So, out of 32 models, 22 of them are either completely unclothed or partially clothed on *Men's Fitness* magazine.

In sum, 49 percent of the magazine covers in this sample emphasize a body with little to no clothing. The amount of clothing that the magazine producers chose to have on the models makes a statement about the importance of the body as a visual representation of masculinity. The more of one's physical features are shown the more the message becomes about the body than the person or celebrity on the cover.

### Body Part Shown

In this sample, there are 10 different categories of body parts that are shown on the covers. What is noteworthy about the part of body shown to the viewer is what the producer of the magazine considers the most important aspect of the body to represent the

magazine. The images that are shown most often are the images that are going to leave the most impression upon the viewer as to what these magazines believe to be the best representations of the male body. Table 4 shows the ten different categories and how much of the overall sample they represented in percentages and number of covers.

**Table 4**  
**Model's Body Part Shown on Cover**

Part of Body shown	Number of covers	Percentage of sample
Full body	6	5.77%
Head shot	6	5.77%
Head to ankle	2	1.92%
Head to knees	11	10.58%
Head to mid-chest	8	7.69%
Head to mid-crotch	1	.96%
Head to mid-shoulder	1	.96%
Head to mid-thigh	41	39.42%
Head to shoulder	1	.96%
Head to waist	27	25.96%

As noted in Table 4, the most common body shot for the figures in the sample of covers is head to mid-thigh with forty one covers. What is notable is that the heterosexually directed magazines have a higher percentage of their magazines showing this particular image than the magazines directed toward a homosexual readership. Of the magazines directed toward the heterosexual reader, 50 percent (26) of the magazines show the model from the head to mid-thigh. *Men's Health* magazine has the highest number of covers with this type of body part representation on its covers. It presents this

image on 18 of its 26 covers. Only eight of *Men's Fitness* magazine's models are shown from the head to mid-thigh.

The results for images capturing a model from head to mid-thigh on the magazines covers directed toward a homosexual readership represents the most covers in that sample as well. However, it is significantly lower than the magazines directed toward a heterosexual readership. Only 15 covers, 29 percent of the magazines directed toward a homosexual reader, show the model from the head to mid-thigh. *Out* magazine has just three models depicted in this category. *Instinct* magazine has 12 cover models shown from the head to mid-thigh, which represents 46 percent of its covers in the sample.

Also seen in Table 4, the second most common body shot is head to waist depictions found on 27 covers out of the 104 in the sample. The comparison of results for heterosexually directed magazines and homosexually directed magazines shows a more even representation on the magazines in this category. Of the heterosexually directed magazines, 13 of the covers have a model that is seen from the head to the waist. Fourteen of the homosexually directed magazines have a model on the cover from head to waist.

While *Men's Health* magazine has just two covers that have models shown from the head to the waist, *Men's Fitness* magazine has 11 of its cover models depicted from the head to the waist. *Out* magazine and *Instinct* magazine do not have such a disproportion between them like *Men's Fitness* magazine and *Men's Health* magazine.

*Out* magazine has models shown from head to waist on six of its covers in the sample.

*Instinct* magazine has eight models shown from head to waist.

In sum, two of the categories, head to mid-thigh and head to waist, dominated the covers overall. The importance of these two categories is the capturing of the areas on the male body that can be physically manipulated naturally or artificially. It is from the neck down to the thigh that men can build physical strength or images can be reimaged to make those body parts appear physically strong. It is this area of their body that men can differentiate themselves from women. Thus, this is where a man's masculinity is embodied.

### Muscularity of Bodies

As previously noted, on these covers, masculinity is represented in the body of the models on the magazines. The capturing of the areas of the male body that symbolize his masculinity becomes more significant when the level of muscularity that is presented to the viewer is repeated continuously. The repetitiousness of the images puts emphasis on the physical structure of these bodies.

In this sample, there are four different levels of muscularity exhibited on the covers. However, muscularity on the figures is skewed to one of two extremes. One level, defined muscles on unclothed body part, appears the most often in the sample. Table 5 shows these categories and how much of the overall sample they represented in percentages and number of covers.



**Table 5**  
**Definition or Absence of Muscles on Model**

Body Shows	Number of Magazines	Percentage
Defined muscles on unclothed body part	52	50.00%
Defined muscles on clothed body part	6	5.77%
Absence of muscles on unclothed body part	7	6.73%
Absence of muscles on clothed body part	39	37.50%

Out of the 104 covers, a model that has defined muscles on the parts of his/her body that are unclothed is 52 magazines. This represents 50 percent of the sample. On the opposite end of the spectrum of exhibiting muscularity is the absence of muscularity on a model. In this sample, 39 magazine cover models do not have any signs of muscle definition on their bodies. The pronounced lack of covers the other two categories indicates the value of extremes in the sample. Thus, the overall sample reveals an edge in the number of covers that have depictions of defined muscles compared to those with the absence of muscles on the cover models.

When looking at which magazines are most represented in these categories, the difference between the heterosexually directed magazines and the homosexually directed magazines becomes more apparent. The heterosexual magazines have 60 percent of the covers show a defined muscular body on unclothed body parts, which is pretty evenly split between the two magazines. *Men's Health* magazine has 14 covers with this image and *Men's Fitness* magazine has 17 presenting this image on the cover. The homosexually directed magazines have 40 percent of its covers show a defined muscular

body on unclothed body parts. Unlike the heterosexual magazines, the distribution of this 40 percent is skewed. *Out* magazine has seven representations of this image on its cover, while *Instinct* magazine has 14.

In the category of absence of muscles on clothed body part, this image is more prevalent on magazines directed toward a homosexual reader. It is found on 26 covers, which is 50 percent of the sample of homosexually directed magazines. *Out* magazine has 16 of its covers with this image. *Instinct* magazine has 10 of its models demonstrate this image on its covers. Drastically different is the number of magazines directed toward the heterosexual reader that have this type of image. Only 13 of the 52 heterosexually directed magazines in the sample present a model with no muscularity on clothed body parts. *Men's Health* magazine uses this image only nine times. *Men's Fitness* magazine uses this image even less with only four images.

In sum, the images that are presented on these covers represent the brand of the magazine. One would expect to find more muscularity shown on *Men's Fitness* magazine and *Men's Health* magazine because the magazines are focused on the body and fitness. *Out* magazine and *Instinct* magazine are general lifestyle magazines. So, the muscularity in the models that are shown is viewed through fashion rather than fitness like *Men's Health* magazine or *Men's Fitness* magazine.

## Visual Analysis – Overall Findings

### Words Used on the Covers

The importance in the use of words with the images is the message that the producer of the magazine is trying to convey and who the targeted audience is. Overall, the covers have no fewer than 17 words and no more than 100 words. The most frequent number of words found on the covers is 46 and 50 words, found six percent and five percent of the time respectively. This shows that the producers of the magazine know they have to be more deliberate in which words they use on the covers to convey what a model could convey on its own.

Of the 104 magazines, there are 12 covers that were identified as targeting heterosexual males directly. Not surprising, these 12 covers are found amongst the 52 magazines in the sample directed towards the heterosexual reader. The words that caused the 12 magazines to distinguish themselves from the others are in phrases such as; “give her what she wants,” “will she cheat? Here’s how to stop her,” “your guide to girls,” “abs for her bed,” and “get fit for her.” Choice words like those allow the viewer to know that this particular magazine is intended for a heterosexual male. The other 40 magazines, which are stated to be directed toward a heterosexual readership by the publisher, did not have any direct language that would indicate heterosexual males are its specific targeted audience.

The magazines that are directed toward a homosexual readership have a sexual connotation to them, which alerts the viewer as to whom the magazine is targeting as an audience. However, the words are less overt than the magazines that are directed toward heterosexual readership. Words that are used on magazines directed toward a homosexual readership are more centered on looking at the male body and how being homosexual impacts different aspects of life. For example: “the naked issue,” “8 guys in briefs and nothing else,” “how firing gay soldiers puts our country at risk,” “gay TV takes off,” “the greatest gay success stories of 2003”. While some of the magazines are sexualized through showing almost nude cover models and having some words that tease the viewer into associating sex with the image, a majority of the magazines directed toward homosexual readership in this sample have some type of socially conscious aspect directed at their readers and how their sexuality plays a part in their everyday lives.

#### Presentation of the Models

All of the models on all 104 covers are of attractive and physically fit people. Physically fit is defined as a person who has no signs of being overweight, who could perform daily activities without fatigue, someone who appears energetic, and takes an active role in maintaining their appearance and physique (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). All of the models on all 104 covers are well groomed. Well groomed is defined as physical aspects that convey they conform to the socially acceptable measure of grooming. They have the following characteristics: their hair is neatly

combed, their clothes are fitted appropriately, and their teeth are white and so no signs of irregularities (crooked or broken teeth).

The most significant grooming aspect in the presentation of the models is the absence of hair on the face, chest or underarms regardless of gender. Out of 104 covers, only two show hair on the arm or underarm. Without the aid of the producer of the images, the reason behind the lack of hair cannot be known for certain. However, one can speculate on the reasons for the lack of hair. First, the lack of hair allows the model's muscularity to show more visually. Second, the male figures that are seen in other media outlets are hairless, such as in professional wrestling or body building television shows. Thus, hairless models on the magazine covers are on par with the trend in media. The hair may detract from the visual attractiveness of the model leading to a decline in magazine sales.

There is an element of sex appeal that the magazine producers are trying to convey. It can be seen through the positioning of the models. As noted earlier, six of the covers in the total sample are of completely unclothed models. Two of the models are women and four of the models are men. Also noted earlier, the two women are strategically used to elicit sexual desire from a heterosexual male. There is no difference between these two images. However, when viewing the four male models, there is a significant difference. The distinction between the four male models is the message behind the imagery conveyed to the viewers.

The *Instinct* magazine cover model is seen from the point of view of a person looking down at a man laying nude in a bed. It is a sexually enticing position due to the

sheets of the bed crossing over the lowest point on his body that covers his genital area. The perception of the viewer is that this man is waiting for a sexual encounter or has just had a sexual encounter. When compared to the other unclothed models, *Instinct* magazine is deliberately using the male body as a powerful medium to connect with the viewer's sexual desires.

*Out* magazine's two unclothed models and the one unclothed model on *Men's Health* magazine are not in a sexual position like the *Instinct* magazine cover model. The *Men's Health* magazine's cover model is shown from the chest up to his head. He appears to have been caught by the camera having fun in a swimming pool. One of *Out* magazine's cover models appears from the chest up to his head also. His pose and the words on the cover convey that he is sunbathing. In addition, his arm is across his forehead indicating he is trying to cover his eyes from the sun. This is not an image that conveys sexual encounters but relaxation and fun.

The second *Out* magazine cover model is standing. The image captures him from his head to his hips. It is somewhat blurred as if the model is standing behind a slightly steamed glass shower door and was caught after he turned the water off. Neither of these two *Out* magazines covers nor the one *Men's Health* magazine cover conveys to the viewer a sexual desire like the image on *Instinct* magazine. All three of these images suggest more of a captured moment in everyday life.

### Image Color

The use of color on the magazine covers is a significant aspect of the research that was captured through visual analysis more than tick marking for content analysis. It was done this way because the imagery as a whole tells more about the producer of the magazine than the reader or viewer. Deliberate use of colors or lack of color can capture an audience's attention or lead to not noticing the image at all.

The images on *Men's Health* magazine are so similar to each other that the covers as a whole appear to be cookie-cut outs of one layout. The words and models change from one issue to the next. However, the covers look like rotating inserts instead of images that are depicting an aspect of real life. The use of black and white on all but three of the covers on *Men's Health* magazine is not attention getting as far as catch words or image. What stands out slightly is the title of the magazine at the top of the page, which is either in tone-down shade of red or orange. The three covers that are in color on *Men's Health* magazine are issues that have famous men as models. They are the following: December 2008 has actor Cam Gigandet on the cover; May 2009 has actor Chris Pine on the cover; and October 2009 has US President Barak Obama on the cover. However, even those three covers do not grab the viewer's attention. Because there is no sharp contrast between the words and the images, *Men's Health* magazine forces the viewer to go to the magazine rack to get a closer examination of the magazine by title alone. So, one must be a knowledgeable magazine reader or familiar with the magazine to notice it among the magazine industry's 72 identified men's magazines for sale.

The other three magazines choose to show contrast between the model and the words through color. While the title of the magazine is prominent, the color contrast allows the magazine to grab a person's attention through a catch phrase or a body part, which would lead them to look at the magazine regardless of whether they were knowledgeable about the particular magazine.

#### Placement of Words and Models on the Covers

The words on the cover are found more often on the left side of the cover. However, some magazine covers surround the models with words on either side of them. There were no instances in this sample that the models were completely behind any word. A few of the models had parts of an arm or leg covered by words. However, none of those instances detracted from the image of the model.

The significance of the placement of the model relative to the words plays an important part in what the magazine cover is trying to convey to the viewer. The models on the covers are typically centered or placed to the right side of the magazine cover. If the models are more visually prominent on the cover, taking up more than half of the cover page, the producer of the magazine is conveying that they believe the model will prompt that person to read or purchase the magazine. If the words are more prominent on the cover than the model, the producer of the magazine believes those catch phrases are important enough to entice the viewer to look inside the magazine for more information, which may lead to a purchase.



All of the magazine covers had words that coordinated with the model's physique, pose or identified the celebrity or professional athlete. For example, one magazine cover had the words "Get Ripped Like A Fighter!" and the image of Floyd Mayweather Jr., who is a professional boxer, next to the words. In cases like these, the producer of the magazine is enticing the viewer with both the catch phrases and the draw of a professional athlete or celebrity. In the sample of 104 magazines, the covers with celebrities or professional athletes positioned the person more prominently than the words.

Overall, the words that are placed on the left and above the center of the page are the words that have font sizes significantly larger than the rest. Placement in this upper left section of the page is what catches USAmerican's eyes first, as it is the starting point to how they were taught left to right reading. These are the words that tell the reader what important information is in the magazine that makes the viewer want to read it or purchase it.

#### Other Observations

While the individual sections of the cover can stand alone in their message, collectively, the cover's words, placement of words, colors on the covers, the way the models are presented, all have a shared meaning for the viewer. That message is that these men that are shown as models represent a form of masculinity to which the viewer must measure his own masculinity against. The words surround the model are not only

telling the viewer how masculinity is being measured, but the heterosexual and homosexual magazine provide a different way to accept how a man falls on this masculinity measurement. Heterosexually directed magazines give the viewer information on how to fix their masculinity so that it equates with or comes close to what is seen in the model. Homosexual directed magazines tell the viewer how to accept their masculinity and be proud of it.

### *Men's Health* Magazine Additional Findings

Overall, *Men's Health* magazine is a periodical that is produced by and targeted to the white heterosexual male. Its editor-in-chief is a white male. Twenty-four out of 26 models are white, while the remaining two are African-American. All 26 covers have men as cover models. Two out of 26 have a woman on the cover, but only as a small insert at the top of the page.

The focus of the magazine is a man's body and how to perfect it. It emphasizes quick fixes and shortcuts to attaining the type of body presented on the covers. *Men's Health* magazine presumes a level of implied understanding from its audience, which is the bodies presented on the covers are attainable with the information contained in the magazine. They neither show nor explain how much time it takes these models to achieve this type of body. They do not explain how much work it takes to maintain this type of body. None of the magazine covers in this sample of *Men's Health* magazine show any type of fitness equipment being used by these models to attain these bodies.

However, there is one instance on a cover that makes a reference to a review of fitness equipment as a small insert on the top right side of the cover page. This magazine puts its emphasis on doing less work and getting more muscle.

Overall, the layout of the magazine for a left to right reading audience is well crafted. As noted earlier in this chapter, the words on the covers in the total sample are found more often on the left side of the page. Twenty out of 26 of *Men's Health* magazine's covers have almost all of its words on the left side of the page. Some of these covers have small inserts with words on the right side. However, the word emphasis is on the left side of the page. The notable exception to this is the name of the magazine. It is in either the color red or orange. It is consistently on the top portion of the cover, in the same size font on all twenty six covers.

The most common words on *Men's Health* magazine are "Get Back in Shape," some derivative of building muscles and losing weight. All of the largest eye catching words are place above the center left side of the cover. Table 6, on the next page, lists the largest eye catching words and second largest eye catching words found on these 26 covers.

In the physical placement of the models, none of the model images are on the left side of the cover. Rather, they are placed either in the center of the page or on the right side of the page. It works well with the placement of the words. In addition, the models

**Table 6**  
**The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of *Men's Health***

Magazine Issue	Largest Words	Second Largest Words
May 1999	LOSE 10 LBS. of Fat!	THE BEER LOVER'S WORKOUT
October 1999	LOSE 10 LBS.	MORE MUSCLE, LESS SWEAT
March 2000	LOOK GREAT NAKED	1-MINUTE MUSCLE MAKERS
August 2000	GET YOUR BODY BACK	BEER; ABS
January 2001	GET BACK IN SHAPE!	THE EASY WAY TO HARD ABS
June 2001	PACK ON MUSCLE!	RATE YOUR MATE
November 2001	GET STRONG	SEX APPEAL
April 2002	BUILD THE PERFECT BODY	YOUR GUT'S A GONER!
September 2002	HARD BODY PLAN	RELAX!
February 2003	GET BACK IN SHAPE!	SAME JOB, LESS STRESS
July 2003	SPECIAL SUMMER ISSUE	EXCLUSIVE 36-PAGE GUIDE
December 2003	ROCK STAR SEX!	ROCK HARD ABS!
May 2004	STRIP AWAY BELLY FAT!	SEX SO GOOD...
October 2004	101 BEST FITNESS PRODUCTS FOR MEN	"A GREAT BODY IS A GIFT TO YOURSELF" -NELLY
March 2005	100 WAYS TO LOOK GREAT	PLUS:THE PERFECT MIND/BODY WORKOUT
August 2005	LOSE YOUR GUT!	SCULPT YOUR ABS!
January 2006	GET BACK IN SHAPE	LOOK BETTER – INSTANTLY!
June 2006	A MAN'S GUIDE TO EATING GREAT	AND LIVING
November 2006	1029 WAYS TO HAVE IT ALL	GET NFL TOUGH!
April 2007	YOUR WINNING SEASON	THE BEST DAMN HEALTH ADVICE FOR MEN
September 2007	YOUR PERSONAL SUCCESS PLAN	HEAL THYSELF!
February 2008	GET BACK IN SHAPE	YOUR BEST BODY EVER!
July 2008	SEX ON THE BEACH!	MUSCLE BEACH!; LIFE'S A BEACH!
December 2008	STAY ON TOP!	100 BEST NEW TECH TOYS FOR MEN
May 2009	STRONG BODY STRONG MIND	THE THREE FOODS YOU MUST EAT TODAY
October 2009	OBAMA'S PLAN	SPECIAL STAY-LEAN-FOR-LIFE ISSUE!

are posing in positions that make it appear they are having fun, doing something outdoors or doing abductor exercises that they can do quickly before running off to a beach.

Furthermore, of the 26 magazine covers, only three models appear to have any type of chest, arm or underarm hair. This is out of the ordinary because biologically males have a prominent amount of hair on their arms, chest, and face while females have less. Therefore, the depiction of males with no arm, chest or underarm hair is a deliberate misrepresentation of a natural state of the male body by the producer of the magazine.

In sum, the magazine captures the viewer with both words and an image regardless of the fact that 23 out of twenty-six cover images are in black and white. It repeats the same image throughout the years, which makes it appear that it has a template. That template represents the one and only image that *Men's Health* magazine equates with its brand, which is the dominant masculinity of the ideal body type. That image is then transferred to the viewer and the social meaning of masculinity becomes understood as that against which one must measure one's own masculinity. If one doesn't measure up to that ideal, the magazine will try and help you get to that ideal with the information contained within its pages.

#### *Men's Fitness* Magazine Additional Findings

Overall, *Men's Fitness* magazine is a periodical that is produced by an editor-in-chief that is a white male and is overtly targeting heterosexual males unlike its competitor *Men's Health* magazine. Out of the 26 covers in its sample, four covers have women as

the main model; three have a bikini on and one has just a thong. There are four covers with unclothed white females as secondary images next to white males as the main image. In addition to those eight women, four additional images of women's heads in the upper right corner as a small insert on the cover. In total, *Men's Fitness* magazine has women grace 12 out of 26 covers, which is 46 percent of the time.

As opposed to *Men's Health* magazine's two covers that have African-American men as models, eight of the covers of *Men's Fitness* magazine feature a minority. Seven of the covers feature an African-American male and one cover features a multi-racial female. This leaves 18 of the covers feature a white male or female. One can surmise that featuring more racial and ethnic groups on the cover that *Men's Fitness* magazine is attempting to connect with a wider audience than its competitor *Men's Health* magazine.

The focus of this magazine is about weight loss much more than muscle building. *Men's Fitness* magazine does not presume its readers have a level of understanding about weight loss or fitness. It has models on fitness machines or holding objects that are related to a sport, which allows the viewer to believe the model's body is a result of a particular machine or sport. It reinforces its message of using fitness equipment and sport participation by having recognizable sports figures and celebrities on its covers. There are 17 covers that have a celebrity or professional athlete as the cover model. Therefore, the overall message is to be active more and lose weight with some type of aid.

Overall, the layout of the magazine is similar to *Men's Health* magazine. It is intended for a left to right reader. Twenty-three out of 26 have almost all of the words on

the left side of the page. Most of the covers have small inserts of words on the right side of the page. However, the main word emphasis is on the left side of the page. The name of the magazine is in a variety of colors, but generally stays within the hues of blue and red. It is consistently at the top portion of the page, but it is not the same size font or in the same line placement on all 26 covers.

The most common words on *Men's Fitness* magazine are "Get Back In Shape," some reference to eating and losing at least 10 pounds. Like *Men's Health* magazine, all of the largest eye catching words are placed above the center left side of the page. Table 7, found on the next page, lists the largest eye catching words and the second largest eye catching words found on these 26 covers.

The physical placement of the models is in the center of the page or on the right side of the page. There are no cases where the model was placed on the left side of the magazine cover. The models are posing in positions that make it appear that they are on the cover to show off their bodies. *Men's Fitness* magazine has 13 out of 26 of the cover models shirtless, which allows the viewer to observe the muscular physique of these models. This is a deliberate choice by the producer of the magazine to showcase the models this way.

Unlike *Men's Health* magazine that has three models that appear to have any type of chest, arm or underarm hair, none of the models on *Men's Fitness* magazine covers have any signs of arm, chest or underarm hair. They further distort the natural state of the human body by airbrushing out the female model's bellybutton on the November 2006 cover.

**Table 7**  
**The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of *Men's Fitness* Magazine**

Magazine Issue	Largest Words	Second Largest Words
May 1999	STRIP FAT FAST!	STRETCH YOUR SUPPLEMENT DOLLAR
October 1999	SEX SURVEY	12 INSTANT NUTRITION FIXES
March 2000	GIVE HER WHAT SHE WANTS	LOSE 10 LBS. WITHOUT DIETING
August 2000	THE BEST WORKOUT	HEALTHY JUNK FOODS
January 2001	YOUR BEST BODY EVER!	CAN A FAD DIET WORK FOR YOU?
June 2001	GET SUMMER ABS	& LOSE FLAB IN SIX WEEKS
November 2001	BUILD YOUR HARD BODY	FOOD SOLUTIONS
April 2002	BUILD MUSCLE NOW!	WILL SHE CHEAT?
September 2002	MUSCLE UP PRONTO!	LOSE FAT WITH GREEN TEA
February 2003	BLAST AWAY YOUR FAT!	AMERICA'S FATTEST CITIES
July 2003	MUSCLE UP WITH LL COOL J	SEX SECRETS
December 2003	STAY FIT FOREVER	MORE MUSCLE FASTER
May 2004	ULTIMATE HARD BODY GUIDE	DANGER!
October 2004	SEX	HOT TUB! HOT BABES!
March 2005	BE YOUR BEST!	THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR IMPROVING YOUR LIFE
August 2005	BE A MAN OF METAL	MF'S FAST FOOD 50
January 2006	STAY JACKED + CUT!	53 WAYS TO MORE MUSCLE!
June 2006	25 FITTEST GUYS	HAVE A GUT-FREE SUMMER
November 2006	325*	LOSE YOUR GUT!
April 2007	582*	CHUCK LIDDELL
September 2007	FITTEST MAN IN THE NFL	BIGGER, STRONGER IN 4 WEEKS
February 2008	BURN FAT	BUILD MUSCLE
July 2008	THE UFC WORKOUT II	LOSE THAT GUT!
December 2008	TIGHT ABS!	MAX FAT LOSS
May 2009	827*	GET LEAN MUSCLE UP!
October 2009	GET RIPPED LIKE A FIGHTER!	FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR.

\* The numbers shown are associated with tips on how to build muscles or build health that are shown in small font.



In sum, the magazine captures the viewer with covers that are packed with words and images in colors that are appealing to the eye. As opposed to the deliberate emphasis on muscle building found on *Men's Health* magazine, *Men's Fitness* magazine is about achieving the idealized body through weight loss. It presumes that its readers are overweight and are in need of a guide to help them reveal the muscular body that is underneath the excess fat on their body. The repetition of information and images with a variety of sports equipment underlines the importance of being active in the achievement of the idealized body.

#### *Out* Magazine Additional Findings

Overall, *Out* magazine is a periodical that is produced for and targeted to homosexual males. Its editor-in-chief is a white male. Twenty-four out of the 26 covers have white models on the cover. One cover has a multiracial male and one has an African-American male. The women that grace the covers of *Out* magazine are presented in two ways. They are either a solo cover model or on the cover with multiple models. Notably, however, the females that are solo cover models are white. The racially minority females are both shown with white models. The Hispanic female is posed on a cheerleader pyramid of two white males. The African-American female is inserted as a small headshot on a cover that has eleven white models.

The focus of the magazine cover is the person on the cover or some aspect of social life. It is a magazine that wants to connect to its reading audience through

celebrities and examining social issues in an entertaining way. For example, they chose words like “What a Drag!” which has a double meaning. One meaning is to be a person who brings a group’s emotions down by his or her constant complaints. The other meaning is the art of homosexual men dressing up in makeup and women’s clothing for entertainment purposes. It is evident by the most common words found on the covers in this sample that this magazine understands its audience looks to it for entertainment. Table 8, found on the next page, lists the largest eye catching words and the second largest eye catching words found on the 26 covers.

The layout of the magazine is not consistent across the sample except for the fact that all of the covers are in color. Unlike the other three magazines, *Out* magazine places the words in different areas of the cover. The name of the magazine is neither in the same spot nor in the same font size or color. Rather, the producers of the magazine have chosen to incorporate the title into the overall theme of the cover page. For example, the March 2005 issue with Dwayne Johnson appearing in a red-orange t-shirt. The title of the magazine is in the same shade of red-orange, which creates a visually appealing and color coordinated image overall.

In the physical placement of the models, there is a lack of consistency as well. The models are placed on the right, left or center of the page. Also, the poses of the models are not cookie-cutter like the heterosexually directed magazines are. There is a wide variety of poses on *Out* magazine. Unlike the heterosexually directed magazines, *Out* magazine presents more of its models in a more natural unaltered state when it comes

**Table 8**  
**The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of *Out* Magazine**

Magazine Issue	Largest Words	Second Largest Words
May 1999	TODD OLDHAM	HOW TO STUFF A WILD BIKINI
October 1999	HILARY SWANK	GARBO'S GIRL; IS BIGGER BETTER; WILLKOMMEN TO SIN CITY
March 2000	PLAY DIRTY	WHAT A DRAG!; CENTER SQUARE; EARTHA KITT; GORE IN GUCCI
August 2000	MY NIGHTS WITH THOMAS GIBSON	TECHNICAL ECSTASY; FALL FASHION; SAPPHIC ROCK
January 2001	100*	DAN SAVAGE ON SLUTS
June 2001	GAY TV	LESBIAN SERIAL KILLER
November 2001	BILL BROCHTRUP	THE CALL OF DUTY
April 2002	CULT OBJECT	ANDREW HOLLERAN
September 2002	DAWSON GETS DOWN	FALL
February 2003	RENEE & GAY CHICAGO	THE ENVELOPE PLEASE
July 2003	MARC JACOBS	GAY RELATIONSHIPS: HOW TO HAVE ONE
December 2003	100*	GREATEST GAY SUCCESS STORIES OF 2003
May 2004	TAKE IT OFF!	GAY MARRIAGE SPECIAL
October 2004	BILLY CRUDUP	IS HE STRAIGHT OR GAY?
March 2005	THE ROCK GOES GAY	SPRING STYLE
August 2005	SPORTS STUD	FALL FASHION PREVIEW:
January 2006	RISING STAR	HEALTH & FITNESS SPECIAL
June 2006	PARIS HILTON	THE HOT ISSUE; TURNS UP THE HEAT
November 2006	OOOH, JAMES!	THE NAME IS BOND, GAY BOND
April 2007	BETTY	35% GAY
September 2007	NAKED & EXPOSED	FASHION MUSIC MOVEIS ART + LIT
February 2008	WATER BOYS	HOT NUDE YOGA
July 2008	YEAH, I AM A FAG	TOUGH LOVE
December 2008	GET WET!	CELEBRITY REBOOT
May 2009	BRUNO	ICH BIN EIN
October 2009	SWIM TEAM	GREEK LOVE

\*This number is associated with the gay success stories of the year. These words are in significantly smaller font.

to chest, arm or underarm hair. Only two out of the 26 covers have models that do not have chest, arm or underarm hair.

In sum, this magazine captures the viewer with a more visually harmonious and fun cover. While the social awareness of the homosexual man's masculinity is perceived as different from the dominant masculine ideal, this magazine uses that as a platform to explore a variety of masculinities and present those on the covers of its magazines. It does not use a template of masculinity like *Men's Health* magazine. Rather, it harmonizes the masculinity of the model with the social issues that it presents on the cover. It attempts to convey a meaning that is beyond the physical though its lack of muscularity in its models as noted previously in this chapter.

#### *Instinct Magazine Additional Findings*

Overall, this periodical is produced for and targeted to homosexual males. Its editor-in-chief is a white male. Twenty-four out of 26 of its covers in this sample have white models on the cover. One cover has a Hispanic male and the other has an African-American male on the cover. Notably, none of the 26 covers have female models.

Table 9 lists the largest and second largest eye-catching words found on the 26 covers.

**Table 9**  
**The Most Prominent Words on the Cover of *Instinct* Magazine**

Magazine Issue	Largest Words	Second Largest Words
May 1999	BALLS!	WORLD'S SEXIEST SPORTS
October 1999	NAKED ISSUE	TRUCKLOADS OF SEXXX
March 2000	BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE	SIMULDATING
August 2000	SCORE!	PLUS!
January 2001	TOASTY!	HOME FOR THE HOLIDAZE
June 2001	MELTDOWN!	SEX!
November 2001	LONE STAR!	LET'S FLIP FOR IT
April 2002	WET 'N' WILD	GREAT SEXPECTATIONS; COY BOYS
September 2002	GOING BLIND; MAD FOR MINI	PLUS!
February 2003	SHOW SOME SKIN	NOTHING PERSONAL
July 2003	IS THERE A PROBLEM OFFICER?	IS BLONDE BETTER?
December 2003	59*	BOY MEETS BOY'S
May 2004	53*	RUFUS
October 2004	50*	REICHEN RETURNS!
March 2005	HOW FIRING GAY SOILDERS PUTS OUR COUNTRY AT RISK	STEP OUT
August 2005	THE JOCK ISSUE	OUT
January 2006	GAY POP!	SEX CRAZED!
June 2006	PRIDE	HEY NICE PACKAGE
November 2006	LEADING MEN OF 2006	TIMM GUNN; WET & WILD
April 2007	SNIKT!	SUMMER PREVIEW
September 2007	GUY	FALL
February 2008	14*	CHIPPENDALES
July 2008	SORID LIVES	SIZZLIN' BEACHES
December 2008	NICK ADAMS	BROADWAY'S GOLDEN BOY
May 2009	PROUD	THE JONATHAN GATRO
October 2009	SEXY SKIVVIES	COVERING ALL YOUR VACATION BASES

\*The number is associated with lists of how to spend time or how many pages of men are inside the magazine for a swimsuit issue. These words are in significantly smaller font.

Much like *Men's Health* magazine, the focus of *Instinct* magazine is the showcasing of the male models. It is a magazine that wants to elicit desire from its audience. It assumes that its audience is reading the magazine for fun and lighthearted information. For example, the October 1999 issue has a model that is nude but his genitals are covered with police caution tape. The presentation of the model in this fashion is playful but has a sexual overtone of “come and get me” to its viewer. The eye catching words convey the same message. The words are “The Naked Issue” and “Truckloads of Sexxx.”

Unlike its competitor *Out* magazine, *Instinct* magazine does not have any seriousness or social issues that grace the cover of the magazine in this sample. The words appear to be a secondary eye-catching point with *Instinct* magazine's covers. The eye-catching words are in a smaller font than the other three magazines in the sample. None of them “pop” out. Rather, they are blended in with the overall cover image.

The layout of the magazine is consistent across the sample. In particular, all the covers appear in color, which are sometimes bright and bold while others are subdued. Similar to *Men's Health* magazine and *Men's Fitness* magazine, the name of the magazine is placed in the upper portion of the cover. It is in the identical location and in the identical size font on all twenty-six covers in the sample. While this magazine alternates the color of the title of the magazine, it remains a stand-out portion of the image presented. Some of the models' heads are placed behind the name and some are placed in front of the name of the magazine, which reveals the importance of the title to the producer of the magazine.

Like *Out* magazine, the physical placement of the models on the cover is all over the page. They are seen in the center, left and right sides of the page. The models are posing in positions that are sexually enticing or playful. *Instinct* magazine has 13 of its models shirtless, which allows the viewer to observe the muscular physique of the models. However, unlike *Men's Fitness* magazine, these models are not showcasing their muscles to encourage the viewer to workout. They are posing in positions that are more sexually charged, which are seen in their facial expressions.

The issue of hair or lack of hair is a theme on *Instinct* magazines covers as well. Of the 27 models on the 26 covers, 11 of the models are shown without chest, arm or underarm hair. As stated earlier in this chapter, the removal of arm, chest and underarm hair is a deliberate misrepresentation of the natural state of the male body by the producer of the magazine. Like the heterosexual magazines, the use of those misrepresentations could be a way to accentuate the male body for better viewing their muscularity.

In sum, the magazine captures the viewer through sexually expressive words and poses from its models. It is through the use of sexuality that *Instinct* magazine presents and deals with the dominant masculine ideal body. Like *Men's Health* magazine and *Men's Fitness* magazine, *Instinct* magazine has more men shown on its covers with the muscularity that is ascribed to the dominant ideal. By sexualizing these bodies, they are removing the abstractness of idealization and presenting totems of masculinity, these bodies, to worship. They are laying claim that these bodies are the form of masculinity that should be revered and desired.

### Discussion

Through consumerism, USAmericans are overwhelmed with media images through daily life. Images on television, in films, and in magazines repeat the dominant ideals of what a male and female body look like. Magazines, in particular, make use of cover pages to showcase the most important images that the producers of the magazines want the viewer to see. These perfected bodies that grace the cover of magazines create and reinforce the social perception of how one's body measures up to the exemplar. Through these 104 magazine covers, an insight into what USAmerican men are being shown in print media is revealed.

The overall sample findings show that 90 percent of the magazine covers have a white model. Of that 90 percent, 92 percent of those models are white men. The use of celebrities or professional athletes is another aspect of bringing to the forefront the whiteness of these covers. As found in the total sample, 50 percent of the magazine covers have a celebrity or professional athlete as the model. Of that 50 percent, 92 percent are white. While it is not unexpected that females of any race are shown on less than 16 percent of these magazines that are classified as men's magazines, what is notable is the lack of representation, only 13 percent, of racial and ethnic minorities on these magazine covers. It is clear that the producers of these four magazines are focused on a white male to represent their brand. It is through deliberate selection of these white cover models that these magazines are reinforcing their social perception of whiteness as an overarching cultureless representation of the USAmerican society (Perry, 2001).



Another aspect of these magazine images is the visible use of the body to convey a representation of masculinity to its viewer. These images of the body are not passive objects of display. They exert power over a person's self-image (Alexander, 2003). Through imagery, men are being exposed to the notion that a key to their masculinity depends on their physical appearance. Thus, the body becomes an agent to social structural ideology, which is transferred from individuals, groups and institutions (Connell, 2009).

Comparatively, the four magazines create a continuum of conservatism and liberalism of how they showcase the model's bodies in relation to clothing, muscularity and which part of the body they show. *Out* magazine is the most conservative in regards to showing an unclothed or partially clothed body. Eighty-one percent of its covers have models that are completely clothed. In opposition to this, *Men's Fitness* magazine is the most liberal. Seventy-three percent of its covers have partially clothed or nude models. *Men's Health* magazine and *Instinct* magazine fall in between these two extremes. *Men's Health* magazine is more conservative than *Instinct* magazine with how many models they show with little to no clothing, 38 percent versus 58 percent respectively.

Underneath the clothing is the body and how much of the body is shown is noteworthy. It conveys to the viewer what aspect of the body the producers consider the most important. The images that are shown the most often are ones that are going to leave the most impression upon the viewer as what represents the best physical form of the male body. The most common body shot for the models on the covers in the total sample is a model from the head to the mid-thigh. Notably, heterosexually directed

magazines have a higher percentage of their magazines that show this particular image than the magazines directed toward a homosexual readership, 50 percent versus 29 percent respectively. Twenty-six percent of the covers, in the total sample, show a model from the head down to the waist making it the second most common depiction of a model. The importance of these two categories is the capturing of the areas on the male body in an image that can be physically manipulated naturally or artificially. It is from the neck down to the thigh that man can build physical strength or images can be reimaged to make those body parts appear physically stronger than they are naturally.

Representations of physical strength becomes more significant as an agent of socializing the physical structure of the body as a symbol of a man's masculinity the more often that imagery is repeated. Within this sample of magazine covers, four different levels of muscularity on the models are exhibited. However, the amount of muscularity is skewed between two extremes, defined muscularity on unclothed body parts and the absence of muscularity on clothed body parts. Fifty eight percent of the models show distinct understandings in their muscular physique whether they are wearing clothes or not while 42 percent have no muscularity in their physique. While all four magazines show all four levels of muscularity on their covers, muscularity in the models on *Out* magazine and *Instinct* magazine is viewed through fashion rather than fitness like *Men's Health* magazine and *Men's Fitness* magazine.

Looking more closely at these bodies presented on the covers in the total sample, all the models on all of the 104 covers are attractive, physically fit and well groomed. The most significant aspect in the presentation of the models is the absence of hair on the

face, chest or underarms. It is a deliberate manipulation of the natural state of a man's body; however, it places emphasis on the muscularity of the body. It is a perfection of these models that further emphasizes an ideal.

Like the body, words used on the cover propel the cultural ideology on to the viewer. The producers of the magazines are deliberate in the words that appear next to the models on the cover. Deliberate use of color or lack of color on the cover can capture an audience's attention or lead someone to not notice the image at all. *Men's Fitness* magazine, *Out* magazine and *Instinct* magazine choose to show contrast between the model and the words through color. While all four magazines use color to make their title prominent, *Men's Health* magazine's use of black and white forces the reader to be purposively aware of the magazine because there is such a lack of contrast.

Words that appear on *Men's Health* magazine and *Men's Fitness* magazine are more oriented around the body and the message is, as Susan Alexander asserts, "that men should build and maintain a hard body" (2003, 542) in order to show their masculinity. *Out* magazine and *Instinct* magazine covers contain words that are more centered on looking at the body through a sexualized lens and how being homosexual impacts different aspects of social life. Thus, *Out* magazine and *Instinct* magazine, representing the subordinated masculine male reader, use their covers to admire the representation of the ideal masculine body rather than try to convince its readers to emulate it as *Men's Health* magazine and *Men's Fitness* magazine do.

Collectively, the cover's words, the placement of words, colors used on the covers, and the poses and muscularity of the models that are presented all have a shared

meaning for the viewer and producer. Through commonly found, often modified, representations the male body, the social message the magazines are conveying is the ideal masculinity to which all men should measure their masculinity. The covers not only tell the viewer how masculinity is being measured in the social world, but they communicate how the heterosexual and homosexual man can approach his placement within this masculine measurement of the ideal. Heterosexually directed magazines give information on how a man can fix their masculinity so that it equates as much as possible with what is depicted on the magazine. Homosexually directed magazines guide men on how to accept their masculinity and be proud of it. The next chapter discusses these images with heterosexual and homosexual men to see if this interpretation of the magazines' message about masculinity corresponds with ideas about masculinity held by the men the magazines target.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The questionnaire found in Appendix D is divided into three areas: influence of media, gym use and exercise, and masculinity. Questions 1 through 12 ask the respondents about their opinions about the media they interact with daily. Questions 13 through 16 ask the respondents about their opinion about exercise and their gym use. Questions 17 through 30 ask the respondents about their views on masculinity in the USAmerican society. Through the questionnaire, these men provide a general social understanding of where their perceptions of masculinity are obtained and affirmed. Also, it provides insight into how white men aged 18 to 34 in USAmerican society view their masculinity in comparison to other men.

#### Description of Sample

The criteria the men had to meet in order to be eligible to participate in this questionnaire and then the focus group was self-identification as white, either heterosexual or homosexual, middle class, and between the ages of 18 and 34. During the data collection period, 42 heterosexual men and 20 homosexual men inquired about the study and volunteered to participate in the questionnaire and focus group. Twenty heterosexual men and seven homosexual men, all self-identifying as middle class and

white between the ages of 18-34, participated in the questionnaire and the focus group sessions for a total sample of 27 men.

For the heterosexual men, the split between full-time students and non-students who worked full-time was even at eight men each. See Table 10. Two men were part-time students. When considering employment status with student status one sees that the eight men who were employed full-time were not students. Three of the men who were employed full-time were part-time students and five of the men were employed part-time and full-time students. Two of the men were not working at all but were full-time students. One man identified himself as a full-time worker and a full-time student. One other man identified himself as a part-time worker but did not identify if his status as a student.

**Table 10**  
**Description of Sample**

Category	Response Option	Heterosexual Frequency(Percent)	Homosexual Frequency(Percent)
Age	18-23yrs old	9 (45%)	3 (29%)
	24-29 yrs old	6 (30%)	1 (14%)
	30-35 yrs old	5 (25%)	4 (57%)
Student	Full-Time	8 (40%)	2 (29%)
	Part-Time	3 (15%)	1 (14%)
	Not a Student	8 (40%)	4 (57%)
	Missing Response	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Employed	Full-Time	12 (60%)	6 (85%)
	Part-Time	6 (30%)	1 (14%)
	Not employed	2 (10%)	0 (0%)
Total in Sample		20 (100%)	7 (100%)

The split between full-time students and non-students who worked full-time was slightly different for the homosexual men. Four of the men were not students and three of the men were students. When considering employment status with student status, one sees that four of the men who were employed full-time were not students. One man was employed full-time and was a part-time student. One man was employed part-time and was a full-time student. One man identified himself as a full-time worker and a full-time student.

Due to the small sample, age was collapsed into three categories. The heterosexual men were generally younger with the largest percentage of them in the 18-23 years old category. The homosexual men are older as a group with the greatest percentage of them in the 30-35 years old category.

#### Amount of Exposure to Masculinity through the Media

##### Electronic Media

The amount of time that the men in this sample spend with different forms of media can provide a sense of how much exposure to images representing masculinity they come in contact with on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. The three modes of accessing these images are using the internet, television and movie viewing, and book and magazine reading.

Beginning with internet use for non-work related activity, 11 out of the 27 men in the total sample use the internet more than ten hours a week. Eleven of the 27 men use the internet between four and nine hours a week for non-work related activity. Only one heterosexual man indicated that he used the internet less than an hour in a week for non-work related use. The remaining four men indicate that they use the internet between one and three hours a week for non-work related activity. What is notable is that 10 out of the 11 who use the internet for more than 10 hours a week for non-work related activity are heterosexual. This could be an indication that homosexual men are more social with each other by other means rather than electronic.

The number of hours this group of men watches television is an indication of the internet as a viable option to television as a source of information and entertainment as well as the impact on contemporary life of internet accessibility. Over half of the homosexual men and heterosexual men indicate they watch less than six hours of television in a week. As a group, 19 out of 27 of the men watch no more than six hours of television, while six of the men watch 10 or more hours of television in a week. Two men in the total sample indicated they watch seven to nine hours of television in a week.

The most notable responses regarding this group of questions are from three participants. These three participants are heterosexual. None of the homosexual participants had responses as these men did. These three heterosexual men not only indicated in Question 1 that they use the internet for more than 10 hours a week for non-work related use, they indicate in Question 2 that they watch 10 or more hours of television in a week. Out of the 27 men in the sample, these three men have the largest



opportunity to be exposed to examples of the dominant masculine ideal body in the media.

The number of movies or films the men in the sample watch on average in a month is similar for the heterosexual and homosexual men. Of the seven homosexual men, a majority of them watch one to three movies in a month. The movie viewing habits of the 20 heterosexual men is evenly split. Half of the men indicate they watch less than three movies in a month. The other half indicates they watch more than four movies in a month.

When combining these three means of accessing of images that represent masculinity, the most notable response is from one heterosexual participant who is the outlier of the group. This individual not only indicated that he uses the internet for more than 10 hours a week for non-work related use and that he watches 10 or more hours of television in a week, he views 10 or more films in a month. He has the most opportunity to be exposed to the dominant ideal and the social understanding of what masculinity should look like.

With the amount of internet use, television and movie watching, it is important to capture the exemplars of masculinity with which these men come into contact. Question 4 and Question 5 on the questionnaire purposively asks what images these respondents focus on the most. Question 4 asks, "Name your favorite recent movie and/or current television show." Question 5 asks, "Name your favorite male celebrity or actor." The more notable difference between these two questions is the answers to Question 5. It is

more telling than the answers to Question 4 about the participants' idea of what type of image they admire.

The following is a list of television shows or films that were given by the 20 heterosexual men: Community, Inception, House, Good Will Hunting, Arrested Development, Archer, Little Fockers, South Park, In the Shadow of the Moon, Sons of Anarchy, Modern Family, Grey's Anatomy, The Big Bang Theory, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, Rules of Engagement, Fringe, Wipe Out, Saving Private Ryan, Family Guy, The Fighter, Topshot, and Tosh O. Additionally, the following is a list of television shows or films that were given by the homosexual men: Inception, Brothers and Sisters, The Office, True Grit, Tron, Freakanomics, Your Highness, and Always Sunny in Philadelphia. Overall, this group of television shows or films is a compilation of comedy, drama and action genres. There is not any particular genre that stands out above the rest.

Question 5, however, does show a distinction in the type of celebrity these 27 respondents chose to hold to a higher standard than other celebrities. The following is a list of favorite celebrities or actors that provided by the heterosexual men and is in rank order: Matt Damon, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Leonardo Dicaprio, Matthew McConaughey, Daniel Day-Lewis, Anthony Hopkins, Clay Matthews, Robert Pattinson, Kevin Spacey, Ryan Philipe, Ryan Reynolds, Will Smith, Vin Diesel, Bruce Willis Charlie Sheen, and Jim Carey. The following is a list of favorite celebrities or actors that provided by the homosexual respondents: Leonardo Dicaprio, Brad Pitt, Jake Gyllenhaal, Chuck Vogelphol and Bo Burnham.

A majority of these men are professionals in the entertainment business, such as Brad Pitt and Matt Damon, who have achieved great success in their acting profession and are admired worldwide. Through that public admiration, they have become symbols of the dominant masculinity. Some of these men are successful in professional sports. With that success, they have greater power and authority afforded to them, which propels them into an exemplar status symbol of hegemony like the actors. For example, Clay Matthews is a successful professional (USAmerican) football player. For Clay Matthews, the nature of his sport requires that his body be muscular and that he show aggressive behavior in the act of playing the sport. This sport propels him into the same category as the actors, which is for him exemplifying ideal masculinity through action and power. As a group, these 27 men in the sample are exposing themselves to similar representations of masculinity to each other, which suggest a homogenous ideal.

Due to the action movie star status of a sizeable number of the men the participants say they admire, one would assume that action and adventure movies would dominate the genre of films they watch most often. Comparing the response options chosen between the heterosexual and homosexual men one sees general similarities in the genre they watch the most. Despite 19 options on the list only six options were marked on the questionnaire as a most watched genre by these 27 participants. Given the answers in Question 5, it is not surprising that 10 of the 27 men selected action as their most watched genre. Comedy is the second most watched genre of film/video/TV entertainment, which was selected by seven of the men in the total sample. Four respondents said the documentary genre is their favorite to watch. The genres of

adventure, thriller, horror and independent are selected by two members each. The complete list of response options can be found in Appendix D.

### Print Media

The questions 7 through 12 on the questionnaire are related to how much interaction these participants have with print media. Book reading is asked about in Question 7. Questions 8 through 12 explore magazines. Overall, the total sample indicates that they expose themselves to less time on print media, in the form of books and magazines, than electronic media. Twenty out of the 27 respondents state they spend three hours or less of their time reading books in a typical week; two indicating no book reading at all. Rather, these 22 men spend four or more hours using the internet a week, watch between four and six hours of television in a week and some see four or more movies in a month. The remaining seven men read books between four and 10 hours a week. The increase of book reading for these seven men is not surprising considering that they are college students and one would expect a heavier amount of time spent on book reading than non-students.

At the heart of the study is the influence of magazine cover images on these men. Thus, questions 8, 9 and 10 directly ask the respondents to indicate how much they expose themselves to magazines. Question 8 inquires about how many magazines they read in a month while Question 9 asks about hours spent reading magazines in a week. Sixteen respondents say they read between one and three magazines in a month. Five

heterosexual men and one homosexual man indicated they did not read or look at magazines at all. Notably, one homosexual participant became the outlier of the group when he states that he reads seven to nine magazines in a month, which is more than any other member of the entire sample. In the middle of these extremes, four participants say they read or look through between four and six magazines in a month.

The amount of time the homosexual men spend reading magazines in a week is less than the amount of time heterosexual men spend reading magazines. Five homosexual men state that they spend less than one hour a week reading magazines. Fourteen out of the 15 heterosexual men who do any magazine reading state they spend less than three hours a week looking through or reading magazines. Two men – one homosexual, one heterosexual - are the outliers of the group. These two men spend between four to six hours reading or looking through magazines in a month.

The last question regarding reading or looking through magazines is Question 10. It asks, “Where do you read or look through magazines most often?” As a sample, reading magazines in paper form at home is more highly desired than the other options provided. It was selected by 15 out of the 21 men who were eligible to answer this question. Sexual orientation did not factor into the answers received on this question. Two men indicate that they read or look through magazines online. One has a preference to read them at the office, while another prefers to read magazines at a store.

In order to identify the magazines that these men have the most interaction with questions 11 and 12 make that inquiry. Question 11 states, “As of today, do you have any magazine(s) subscription(s)?” Twenty one of the 27 men in this study were eligible

to answer these two questions based on their answer to Question 8. Of the 21, 15 of them indicate they have at least one magazine subscription. It is not unexpected to note that the men who prefer to read magazines in stores or online do not have magazine subscriptions. One man who indicates he has at least one magazine subscription stated that his preference is to read them at the office. As a group, the majority of men find it preferable to read magazines at home in paper form over other locations or formats and have subscriptions to those magazines they read the most.

What are those magazine they read the most? In order to be eligible to answer this question, the men had to have answered yes they have a magazine subscription in Question 11. Question 12 asks the respondents to list up to 5 magazines for which they have subscriptions. There are some similarities in the magazines to which the heterosexual men and the homosexual men subscribe. Both heterosexual and homosexual men provide *Men's Health* magazine as the name of a magazine for which they have subscriptions. Notably, *Men's Health* magazine is listed in the *Standard Periodical Dictionary* and Borders Group Inc. (Appendix A) as a heterosexual men's magazine.

The rest of the magazines listed by the heterosexual group collectively represent a wide gamut of interests. The following is the list of magazines for which twelve of the fifteen eligible heterosexual men indicate they have subscriptions: *The Economist*, *The Week*, *Men's Health*, *Popular Science*, *US News & World Report*, *Time*, *American Rifleman*, *Muscle & Fitness*, *Game Informer*, *National Geographic*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Family Handyman*, *Handy Magazine*, *Splat*, *Action Pursuit*, *Transworld Snowboarding*,

*Bass Player Magazine, Gameinformer, NRA, and Runners World.* The majority magazines for which the heterosexual men have subscriptions are not classified as “men’s” magazines. They are more general interest magazines or activity oriented magazines as classified by the periodical industry.

Due to the smaller number of homosexual men in the group the list of magazines to which they have subscriptions is much smaller than the list from the heterosexual men. However, there is a pattern amongst the homosexual men. They tend to have subscriptions for more magazines that are aimed at social issues or self-improvement. The following is a list of magazines for which the three eligible homosexual respondents indicate they have subscriptions: *Men’s Health, The Advocate, Out, GQ, Newsweek, Money Inc, and Wired.* Of the magazines listed by the homosexual men, *Men’s Health* and *GQ* are magazines found in the list the *Standard Periodical Dictionary* and Borders Group Inc. that have identified as a “men’s” magazine directed toward heterosexual men. The *Advocate* and *Out* are magazines are identified by *Standard Periodical Dictionary* and Borders Group Inc. as magazines that are directed toward homosexual men. These complete list of the categorization by Borders Group Inc. and the *Standard Periodical Dictionary* can be found in Appendices A and B.

In sum, the use of electronic means to connect with the entertainment world and other aspects of social life provides these men an ample opportunity to come in contact with the ideal masculine body, as found in Chapter 3. Over 81 percent of the total sample uses the internet more than four hours a week, some in excess of seven to 10 hours a week, for activities not related to their jobs. Seventy percent of the total sample spends

up to six hours of their week watching television and between one and three movies in a month. With this much potential exposure to images that provide hints about masculinity, how they receive the message and what they interpret as the message has an impact on their own view of masculinity.

The images to which they expose themselves reflect their idealized form of masculinity. As pointed out in Chapter 1, athletes are just one example of an idealized form of masculinity (Connell, 2005). Virtually all of the men in the sample selected as “favorites” male film actors who are exemplars of the dominant ideal. All of these actors are all white males who are successful in their field. Most have bodies that are muscular and physically fit and play action or powerful roles in movies. In addition, the magazines that the men in the sample choose to come in contact with the most, through subscriptions in particular, provide additional exposure to these types of activities that are stereotypically associated with masculinity.

### Gym Use and Exercise

Getting a sense of how and how much time these men put into controlling the way their bodies represent their views of their own masculinity is important to the study. It is through examining exercise that this information is captured. Questions 13 through 16 ask the participants about their exercise habits and the reasons behind their exercising.

Question 13 states, “On average, how many times a week do you exercise?” Only one participant in the total sample indicates that he does not exercise at all. Thus, he was



not eligible to respond to questions 14, 15, or 16. The rest of the 26 men exercise at least one day a week. A majority of the men, 21 participants, exercise in excess of three days a week. Ten of the men in the sample claim they exercise between five and seven days a week, while three to four days a week is the average number of days a week 11 men exercise. Neither age nor sexual orientation plays a factor in how many days a week these men exercise.

Question 14 asks for reasons they exercise and instructs them to mark all in a list of nine possibilities that apply. Table 11 shows the response options selected in rank order for the total sample. Notably, the top two answers are common among all the

**Table 11**  
**Rank Order of Reasons for Exercising**

	Heterosexual	Homosexual	Total marked
Maintain my fitness level	14	4	18
To build muscles	12	4	16
To lose weight	8	0	8
To gain weight	2	4	6
To maintain my health	0	3	3
I work at the gym	0	3	3
To better my health	0	2	2

groups of men. Of the 26 respondents eligible to answer this question, based on the answer to Question 13 which is that they exercise at least one time a week, the most common answer is to maintain their fitness level. The second most common response is to build muscles. Notably, the heterosexual men indicate that losing weight is the third most common answer given to why they exercise. In addition to maintaining fitness, the

homosexual men indicated that building muscles and gaining weight were high on their list of reasons for exercise.

Where these men exercise and how much time they spend there is important to assess because it makes a statement of how much exercise is part of their socialization. Whether they choose to exercise at home or at a gym, location can give an indication of their level of interaction with men who have sculpted their bodies to resemble the ones found on the magazines sampled in this research. The more exposure they have to these ideal bodies the more their understanding of masculinity can be reinforced or refuted.

Where they choose to exercise was not as uniform. Of the 26 men who were eligible to answer the question, ten men indicate that they only exercise at a gym. Of the remaining 16, two indicate that they prefer to exercise only at a home. A majority of the men, 13 out of 26, have no preference between the gym and home as a location to exercise. Twenty four out of 26 of the men say they only exercise one time a day when responding to Question 16. The full list of response options to this group of questions can be found in Appendix D.

In sum, almost all of these men consider exercise an important part of their routines. Except for one man who does not exercise at all, all of the men in the sample exercise at least one day a week; some exercise almost daily. The main reasons they exercise are to maintain their fitness and to build muscles. The fact that as a group they chose building muscles as the second most important reason they exercise suggests a connection between muscularity and their understanding of how they want to present their masculinity. Ranked last in their reasons to exercise is to better their health. Thus,

health is not a motivating factor in their participation in exercise. There is not an overwhelming preference as far as the location for exercise. Whether they exercise at home or at the gym seems to be less important to them than the reasons for their exercising.

### Masculinity

Assessing the amount of exercise, the reasons men exercise and the amount of exposure they have of images to the ideal body type does not complete the picture of how these men define masculinity for themselves. Those things play a part in shaping that perception. Questions 17 through Question 30 delve more deeply into what masculinity means to these men and how they measure their own masculinity against other men.

#### Words That Best Describe Masculinity in US American Society

Question 17 asks the respondents the following; “List 5 words you think describe what it means to be masculine in the United States.” A compilation of the words provided by the men is broken into four categories originated by Robert Brannon (1976) and one additional category: Sturdy Oak, Big Wheel, Give ‘em Hell, No Sissy Stuff and Other. Sturdy Oak words are words that suggest strength and emotional detachment. The Big Wheel category contains words that have to do with financial success. Words that describe aggressive and dominating behavior fall into the Give ‘em Hell category. Words that are not associated with femininity make up the category of No Sissy Stuff.

The category of other is added to the list in order to capture all of the words that do not fall into one of the other four categories. The complete list of the words and number of times they were stated for the total sample is listed below in Table 12.

**Table 12**  
**Men's Responses to Question 17**

	Heterosexual /N	Common Words /N	Homosexual /N
Sturdy Oak	Straightforward / 1	Strong / 11	Courageous /1
	Resourceful / 1	Tough / 4	Fortitude / 1
	Logical / 1	Strength/ 2	Endurance / 1
	Clever / 1		Character / 1
	Smart / 1		
	Hard-working / 1		
	Strong-willed / 1		
	Rational / 1		
	Motivated / 1		
	Integrity / 1		
	Decisive / 1		
	Wise / 1		
	Determination/ 1		
	Unflinching / 1		
	Responsible / 1		
	Honorable / 2		
	Mature / 1		
	Professional/ 1		
Big Wheel	Successful/ 1		Wealth / 1
	Self-Sufficient/ 1		Financially successful / 1
Give 'em Hell	Assertive/ 1		Leader / 1
	Bold / 1		
	Aggressive / 3		
	Powerful / 2		
	Patriotic / 1		
	Power / 1		
	Brave / 3		
No Sissy Stuff	Athletic / 4	Confident/ 5	Muscular / 1
	Rugged/ 1	Independent/ 6	Groomed / 1
	Thick/ 1	Tall/ 2	Lean / 1

**Table 12. (continued)**

	Heterosexual /N	Common Words /N	Homosexual /N
	Energetic/ 1	Fit/ 2	Vascular (cardio) / 1
	To have six pack abs/ 1		Jock / 1
	Sexual/ 1		Deep voice / 2
	Handsome/ 1		Manly walk / 1
	Sex Appeal/ 1		Big muscles / 1
	Sexual / 1		Big / 1
	Macho / 1		Bald / 1
	Healthy/ 1		Facial hair / 1
	Manly/ 1		Meathead / 1
	Interesting/ 1		
	Autonomous / 1		
	Chivalry / 1		
	Size / 1		
Other	Personable / 1	Attractive/ 2	Supportive / 1
	Nice / 1		Wit / 1
	Versatile/ 1		Funny / 1
	Selfless / 1		Insightful / 1
	Dependable / 1		

\* This list is compilation of words from the total sample. N represents the number of times a word is stated in the total sample.

Of the total list in Table 12, 89 words are provided by the heterosexual men who chose to answer the question. The word strong, and two of its synonyms, is the most common descriptive word used listed 10 times by the heterosexual men for what they believe it means to be masculine in the U.S. A person who is independent is a sign of masculinity in the U.S. to these men, being stated five times. Other top words that are mentioned four times total are athletic, confident, and brave. Notably, the sturdy oak category, i.e. strength and emotional detachment, is where the majority of words chosen by the heterosexual men to describe masculinity fall.

Of the total list of words, 32 words are provided by the homosexual men who chose to answer the question. Similar to the heterosexual men, the words strong and strength are the most common descriptive word used listed four times for what these men believe it means to be masculine in the U.S. Overwhelmingly, the words used to describe masculinity by the homosexual men fall into the no sissy stuff category of words. This was the second category of words most used by the heterosexual men.

#### Are Your Words for Masculinity Represented in the Media?

Questions 18, 19 and 20 asked the respondents to reflect on their answer to Question 17 in various ways. While all of the men were eligible to answer these questions, one man chose not to answer these three questions.

The first in this series of questions ask respondents if they think the images on the covers of magazines represent the words they put down for Question 17. Thirteen of the heterosexual men and all seven of the homosexual men said that the words they chose in Question 17 reflect the masculinity they see in magazine cover images. Interestingly, the homosexual men's assessments are based on magazines supposedly directed to heterosexual men as well as those directed to homosexual men. Thus, their assessment is based on a wider range of magazines.

The next question in the series asks the respondents masculinity and television images. It states, "Thinking about your answer in Question 17, do you think masculinity is represented, by the words you selected, in television images?" Overall more men said

yes to Question 19 than Question 18. Eighteen of the men in the total sample said that they believe the words they chose in Question 17 are represented in the images of masculinity they see on television shows. While a majority of heterosexual men said yes to this question, the homosexual men were split on whether or not their words describing masculinity are reflected in television images. However, a comparison of the two lists of television shows provided in Question 4 and words put down in Question 17 to describe masculinity in the U.S. suggests no substantive differences between the two groups. The reason for the split amongst the homosexual men on whether their words are represented on television is not captured by the questionnaire.

The final question in the series asks the respondents to think about their words from Question 17 and assess if those words are represented by the images they see in films. It specifically asks them to recall their favorite genre of film as indicated in their response to Question 6. Question 6 was included to focus the men's attention on the particular genre they find most appealing and to which they presumably have more exposure. Of the 19 heterosexual men who answered this question, 18 indicate that the words they chose for Question 17 do describe the masculinity they see in the images in their favorite film genre. Six of the seven homosexual men indicate that the words they chose are represented in the images they see in their favorite film genre.

In sum, these men see their idea of masculinity represented in the media with which they spend the most time. These images contribute to creating an understanding of masculinity as well as reaffirming the understanding of masculinity these men believe exists in their larger society. That image can be described by the most common words

these men used to describe masculinity in the U.S. Those words in rank order are strong, independent, confident, and tough.

### Your Three Most Important Sources for Learning Masculinity

In order to assess where these men learned what masculinity means, Question 21 asks the respondents to, “List in order, from 1 to 3, the 3 most important sources from which you learned the most about what it means to be masculine.” There are 14 response options to this question, which can be found in Appendix D.

The response option that is selected more often than the others by both the heterosexual men and the homosexual men as the number one source, from which they learned the most about what it means to be masculine is “father”. While the heterosexual men found movies to be their second source from which to learn the meaning of masculinity, the homosexual men indicate that it is a male friend who has taught them the meaning of masculinity. Books round out the top three of most important sources for heterosexual men from which they learned the most about what it means to be masculine. While male teachers rank third with the homosexual men as a source from which they learned masculinity, the heterosexual men ranked male teachers at the bottom of their list, preferring books over teachers to school them about masculinity.

Given the different degrees of interaction with TV and magazines indicated on the questionnaire, it is surprising to find that TV and magazines tied on the list at number five. Brothers and mothers ranked sixth overall as important sources from which the men



learned masculinity. At the bottom of the overall ranking are sources such as music, female friends, male teachers, male cousins, a friend's dad, and coworkers. Response options female teacher and sister were not chosen by either heterosexual or homosexual men as sources from which they learned masculinity.

These responses indicate that learning masculinity from their fathers and their peers was more important than television and magazines and suggest that formulating their understanding of masculinity begins early in boys' lives. The first influence in defining masculinity comes from those that boys interact with on an intimate and daily basis. As they age through adolescence and young adulthood, young men see images in the media that are replications of that understanding of masculinity. These images, then, reinforce their understanding of masculinity they learned as children.

#### Words Others Would Use to Describe Your Masculinity

Question 22 is similar to Question 17: respondents are asked to, "List five words that your family or friends would use to describe your masculine trait(s)." The men's selection of *strong* as the most common word others would use to describe their masculinity replicates their response to Question 17. The words *tall* and *confident* are mentioned by heterosexual men as many times as *strong* as descriptors they believe their families or friends would use in reference to their masculinity. This similarity between what the men believe represents masculinity in US American society and how they think

others perceive their own masculinity is noteworthy. Table 13 provides the complete list of words given by the men for Question 22.

There are also notable difference between the way these men describe what it means to be masculine in society and what they think others would say about their

**Table 13**  
**Men's Responses to Question 22**

	Heterosexual/N	Common Words/N	Homosexual/N
Sturdy Oak	Direct/ 1	Strong/ 6	Stoic/ 1
	Persistent/ 1	Courageous/ 2	No-nonsense/ 1
	Motivated/ 1	Smart/ 3	Deliberate/ 1
	Decisive/ 1	Reliable/ 2	Integrity/ 1
	Logical/ 1		Strength/ 1
	Determined/ 1		Arrogant/ 1
	Responsible/ 1		Courage/ 1
	Perseverance/ 1		Dismissive/ 1
	Respectable/ 1		Trustworthy/ 1
	Respectful/ 1		
	Loyal/ 2		
	Independent/ 1		
Big Wheel	Self-sufficient/ 1		
Give 'em Hell	Bold/ 1	Tough/ 2	Assertive/ 1
	Powerful/		Pit-bull/ 1
No Sissy Stuff	Deep voice/ 1	Athletic/ 3	Horny/ 1
	Coordinated/ 1	Chivalrous/ 3	Hairy/ 1
	Lean/ 2	Confident/ 4	Tattoos/ 1
	Fit/ 1	Big/ 2	Broad shoulders/ 1
	Ripped/ 1	Honorable/ 3	Courteous/ 1
	Huge/ 1		
	Jacked/ 1		
	Shredded/ 1		
	Handsome/ 1		
	Active/ 1		
	Rugged/ 1		
	Masculine features/ 1		
	Tall/ 3		

**Table 13. (continued)**

	Heterosexual/N	Common Words/N	Homosexual/N
	Good with hands/ 1		
	Traps (i.e. muscles)/1		
	Energetic/ 1		
	Beastly/ 1		
	Fitness Level/ 1		
	Outdoorsy/ 1		
	Muscular/ 1		
	Thickness/ 1		
	Adventurous/ 2		
Other	Zeal for life/ 1	Attractive/ 2	Funny/ 1
	Generous/ 1		Quick (as agile)/1
	Selfless/ 2		Looks/ 1
	Easy going/ 1		Spontaneous/ 1
	Concerned/ 1		Flexible/ 1
	Selfless/ 1		Wirey/ 1
	Musical/ 1		
	Caring/ 2		
	Cute/ 1		
	Humorous/ 2		
	Kind/ 1		
	Speech/ 1		
	Skinny/ 1		
	Eyes/ 1		
	Dependable/ 1		
	Supportive/ 1		

\*This list is compilation of words from the total sample. N represents the number of times a word is stated in the total sample.

masculinity in terms of the types of words used. Sexual orientation and age factor into these perceptions of how others see their masculinity. As a total sample, they describe masculinity in USAmerican society in Question 17 with more Sturdy Oak words. In answering Question 22, the heterosexual men think others would describe them with

more No Sissy Stuff words. The homosexual men believe others descriptions of them would be sturdy oak words. Both are differing categories from what they stated in Question 17. Notably, age influences this perception more than sexual orientation. The older men, in particular the homosexual men, claim others would see them more with sturdy oak words. Thus, the men in the total sample have a clear perception of what masculinity is in the larger society. Yet, the heterosexual men perceive other people in their lives think their masculinity fall into the no sissy stuff category of words. The homosexual men attribute more strength and emotionally detachment words from the sturdy oak category.

### Comparative Masculinity

In order to probe more deeply into men's masculinity as it relates to others, Questions 23 through 26 on the questionnaire ask the respondents to make comparisons between themselves and male friends or other men. The series of questions begins with their general assessment of their masculinity as compared to their male friends. It continues with asking the men to assess their masculinity relative to other men in the context of exercise.

Only two respondents out of the 27 men in the sample think they are less masculine than their male friends. Notably, the heterosexual male that indicated that he does not exercise feels less masculine than his male friends. Ten of the heterosexual men

feel they are more masculine than their male friends. Nine believe they are neither more nor less masculine than their male friends.

Like the heterosexual men, a majority of these homosexual men feel they are equal to or are more masculine than their friends. However the homosexual men feel they are neither more nor less masculine than their male friends, while the heterosexual men believe they are more masculine than their male friends. Interestingly, in both groups of men, the men that are in the age category 30-35 years old indicate they feel they are equal in masculinity with their male friends. The reason for this, which is supported in the focus groups discussions, is because they are more comfortable in their own masculinity and have more friends that are similar to them.

When comparing the general population of men who exercise versus those who do not exercise in Question 24, the distribution of the response options for this question shows a polarity in opinions. More heterosexual men, 12 out of 20, in this sample believe that men who exercise are more masculine than those that do not exercise. However, seven of the heterosexual men feel that, men, in general, who exercise are less masculine than those that do not exercise. There is one heterosexual man that is neutral. The responses that are chosen by the seven homosexual men are similarly distributed. Four of the homosexual men believe that men, in general, who exercise are more masculine than those that do not. The other three homosexual men think that men, in general, who exercise are less masculine than those that do not exercise. Both groups are split across opposite positions.

Question 25 asks the men to compare themselves to men who do not exercise and to state if they are more or less masculine than such men. It states, “Compared to men that **do not** exercise, do you think **you** are....?” A majority of the heterosexual men, 12 men, state that they believe that they are more masculine than men who do not exercise, which is consistent with how this group answered Question 24. Seven of the heterosexual men have the belief that they are no more or less masculine than those who exercise. The one heterosexual man that indicated he thinks he is less masculine than men who do not exercise, also claims he does not exercise and believes he is less masculine than his friends, and was neutral in his answer to Question 23. Unlike the heterosexual men, the majority of the homosexual men believe they are neither more nor less masculine than other men who do not exercise. Three of the homosexual men believe they are more masculine than men who do not exercise.

The last question in the series asks, “Compared to men that **do** exercise, do **you** think you are....?” Overall, a majority of the men in the sample state they are no more or less masculine when comparing themselves to men who exercise. While three heterosexual men and two homosexual men indicated they consider themselves less masculine than men who exercise, seven heterosexual men and one homosexual man believe they are more masculine than men who exercise. Notably, while only one homosexual man believes he is more masculine than other men who exercise, based on his answers to Questions 13 and 16 in which he states he exercises twice a day, five to seven times a week, one can surmise that his physical body is of prime importance to his presentation of masculinity. Similarly, four of the heterosexual men who indicate that

they believe they are more masculine than men who exercise are the ones in this group that exercise five to seven days a week. The other three men who think they are more masculine than men who exercise state that they exercise three to four days a week. For these men the connection between their dedication to the shape of their bodies and their sense of superior masculinity relative to other men seems clear.

In sum, when assessing their own masculinity against other men in society, the majority of the men in the sample believe they are more masculine than their male friends. Moreover, this series of questions show that exercise factors into these men's perceptions of themselves as well as other's masculinity. As a group, they feel that men, in general, who exercise are more masculine than those that do not. In addition, all of the men in the sample, except one, indicate that they regularly exercise during the week. A majority of these men feel that they are more masculine than men who do not exercise. By the same token, they do not believe that they are more or less masculine than other men who do exercise. So, there is a sense of association they make between their own commitment to exercise, their masculinity and other's masculinity based on how much one does or does not exercise.

### Signs of Masculinity via the Body

Question 27 states, "Do you think masculinity is shown through....?" There are eight response options provided in this question. However, both the heterosexual men and the homosexual men chose only four out of the eight the response options. The

complete list of response options is located in Appendix D. Two of the response options are shared between the groups, and they are the most frequent choices. The remaining two options chosen by each group are unique to those groups. Table 14 lists these responses and shows the frequency of that response option being chosen. An explanation follows.

Although narrowly so, the largest number of men in the sample – 12 – believes masculinity is demonstrated through certain personality characteristics. But for 11 men muscularity in addition to certain characteristics defines masculinity. To this, one man would add having “six pack abs”. Two men appear to equate masculinity entirely with

**Table 14**  
**Ways Masculinity is Shown**

	Heterosexual	Homosexual
Being muscular	1	
Being muscular, having six-pack abs, and certain personality characteristics	1	
Having certain personality characteristics	10	2
Both being muscular and having certain personality characteristics	8	3
Having six-pack abs		1
None of the above		1

muscularity, in general or in terms of “abs.” In sum, 24 of the 27 men believe that masculinity is defined by the display of particular personality – or subjective - characteristics. However, for half of those men masculinity also involves muscularity.



### My Masculinity versus the Media

The last part of the questionnaire brings the focus back to the impact of men's relationship with the media in terms of their assessment of their own masculinity relative to the images they see in the media. Questions 28, 29 and 30 ask the respondents to compare themselves to the images in media they view the most. From their answers, one can glean the underlying source(s) from which these men can recognize masculinity and reaffirm their beliefs about what masculinity means. .

Question 28 states, "In general, do you think you are more or less masculine than the images on magazine covers that you read the most?" As indicated in Question 21, magazines rank sixth, overall, in the most important sources from which these men learned what masculinity means. Twelve of the men in the sample believe they are neither more nor less masculine than the images they see on the covers of magazines they read the most; eleven of the men in the sample consider themselves less masculine than the images on the covers of the magazines they read the most. Considering this question with Question 9 on the number of hours spent in a week reading magazines, one sees that men who believe they are less masculine than the images on magazine covers spend less time (on average less than one hour a week) looking through or reading magazines than the other men.

Opposed to that feeling of being less masculine than the images found on magazine covers, four heterosexual men believe they are more masculine than the images on the magazine covers. None of the homosexual men see themselves as more masculine than the images on the cover of magazines they read the most. Two of the heterosexual

men who feel they are more masculine than the images on the covers of magazines they read spend between four to six hours a week looking through or reading magazines which are not considered “men’s” magazines by either Borders Group Inc. or the *Standard Periodical Dictionary*. The images of masculinity in the magazines that they view the most, such as the *Economist* or *National Geographic* are not comparable to the images of masculinity in the (heterosexual) men’s magazines considered in the study.

The next assessment is a comparison of men’s own masculinity to images they see on television. As indicated previously, television ranks fourth in the most important sources from which these men learned what masculinity means. A majority of the men in this sample watch less than six hours of television in a week. Seventeen of the 27 men indicate they do not consider themselves more or less masculine than the images they see most on television. Four men consider themselves less masculine than the images on television. It is notable that four of the six men who consider themselves more masculine than the images they see on television watch more than 10 hours of television in a week. Moreover, these men who consider themselves more masculine than the images they watch on television exercise five to seven times a week. Since most televisions in gyms are controlled by the gym staff and are tuned to news or talk shows or general programming, it is likely these men are exposed to programs they may not choose for themselves. Thus, these television shows could conceivably have men shown that these five men would consider less masculine than they consider themselves to be. In sum, while some of the men feel more or less masculine than the images they see on television,

most of the men believe their masculinity to be neither more or less masculine than the images on television.

The last question asks the participants to compare themselves to images they see in films. Specifically, Question 30 states, “In general, do you think you are more or less masculine than the images in movies or films that you watch the most?” Like the previous two questions, a majority of the men feel they are neither more nor less masculine than the images in the genre of films they watch the most. Notably, eleven of the men in the sample do indicate they believe they are less masculine than the images in movies are film they watch the most. The genre that is favored the most out of these eleven men is action. And per their collective answers to Question 17, the presentation of the main character in action films is what these men in the sample consider to be a representation of masculinity in USAmerican society. Thus, it is not surprising that 26 out of the 27 men do not feel they are more masculine than the images they see in films.

Overall, the answers in these final questions asking the men to compare themselves to the images that they choose to expose themselves to most seem to suggest that the images they see are more reflections of how they perceive their own masculinity. The majority of the men in the sample do not believe they are more or less masculine than the images on magazine covers they read most often, in television shows or in movies they view most often. Through this belief, they can remain confident in their self-assessments of how they compare to other men and where their status lies relative to the dominant ideal masculinity.

### Discussion

The responses that are provided by the total sample offer insights into men's personal views of masculinity, their masculinity in relation to others and the level of commitment they have to positioning themselves in close proximity to the idealized body through exercise. The images that they expose themselves to through television, the internet, movies and magazines provide these men a source to draw comparisons of themselves and others.

When asked on the questionnaire if the images in the media represent the words they used to describe USAmerican masculinity, overwhelmingly they answered yes. The words they used depicted masculinity mainly as emotionally detached, showing physical strength and non-feminine. Twenty out of the 27 men said the words they stated reflect the masculinity they see on magazine covers. Eighteen in the total sample said they believe the words they chose are represented in the images of masculinity they see on television shows. Twenty-four out of the 27 men indicate that the words they chose for masculinity in the U.S. is represented in the images they see in their favorite film genre. Thus the images which they spend the most time contribute to the dissemination of and reaffirm their understanding of masculinity stemming from the dominant social ideology that values muscularity to show masculinity.

When comparing themselves to others, a majority of the men in the sample feel they are more masculine than those that do not exercise. Fifty-nine percent of the total sample believe that men that exercise are more masculine than those that do not. However, this study found that health is not a motivating factor in their participation in

exercise. The most common reason given to why they exercise is to maintain their fitness level. The second most common reason provided by the total sample for exercising is to build muscles. The fact that as a group they chose building muscles as the second most important reason to exercise suggests the connection muscularity has with their self-perceived masculinity and the masculinity they want to present to others. Overall, there is an association on their part between their own commitment to exercise, their masculinity, and other's masculinity with the extent to which one does or does not exercise.

The next chapter explores these questions and perceptions through focus group discussion. While they indicate on the questionnaire their individual views, in a group setting these opinions may be influenced by others. It is through focus groups that a deeper understanding of these perceptions is better captured.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS FOR THE FOCUS GROUPS

This study contains five groups of white men who participated in the focus groups. To take part in the focus group men had to meet the eligibility requirements and respond to the questionnaire. All of the participants completed the questionnaire prior to the start of the focus group sessions. The purpose of the focus groups is to explore the notion of masculinity in more depth than could be done with the questionnaire. Through the focus groups these men provide insight into how masculinity is understood and expressed by white men aged 18 to 34 in USAmerican society.

#### Description of the Members of the Focus Groups

##### Group 1- The Straight College Men

This group consisted of four heterosexual men. All four of these men were full-time students at a Washington D.C. college or university. Three did not work at all and one worked full-time. The ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-nine. Their physical bodies showed no signs of muscularity or body mass. All of these men stated on the questionnaire that they worked out a couple of times a week.

Collectively, this group's average use the internet eight hours a week for non-work related activity. On average, they watch three to four hours of television in a week. This group averages about four movies a month in viewing habit. The members of the group chose the names Robert, Ron, Fry and Scooby as their pseudo names, which will be used when making references to their individual answers or group discussions.

#### Group 2 – The Straight Working Men

This group consisted of six heterosexual men. All of these men worked full-time. The ages of this group ranged from twenty-five to thirty-two. This group was the most diverse when it came to exercise. Five of the men exercised regularly, two exercised occasionally and one of the men did not work out at all. This is the most diverse group of men out of the five focus groups. Their physical bodies represented the spectrum of male body types. Two were very muscular; one was overweight, two were thin with no signs of muscularity; and one has some muscularity but not pronounced like the two who appeared muscular.

Collectively they average nine hours of internet use dedicated to non-work related activity. The average number of hours they watch television is five and a half hours. They watch an average of three to four movies in a month. The members of this group did not use pseudo names during the focus group because they knew each other. However, they will be referred to as the following to protect their anonymity in this research: Brady, Red, President, Maddog, Jeep, and Hart.

### Group 3 – The Straight Athletes

This group consisted of six heterosexual men. Five out of six are full-time college students at a Washington D.C. university and play the sport of lacrosse. Notably, one lacrosse player is a self-identified gym fanatic and spent most of his free time at the gym and works part-time there as well. The sixth man in this group is neither a student nor a lacrosse player but does participate in social sports like softball. The age range for this group of men is between 18 and 29. As athletes, these men's bodies show some muscularity but not pronounced muscularity.

The number of hours this group averaged using the internet for non-work related use is seven and a half. Their television viewing habits were the most diverse. Three of the men watch less than an hour of television a week. Of the remaining three, they average about seven hours of television viewing in a week. Collectively, this group sees about six movies a month. This group chose their own pseudo names. They will be referred to as such from this point forward to protect their anonymity. Their names are: George, Matthew, Daniel, Bruce, Brad, and Jim.

### Group 4 – The Power Lifter Straight Men

This group consisted of four self-identified former body builders or current power lifters. All of these men work full-time. One is a part-time student at a Pennsylvania online college. The other four are not students. The ages of this group vary from 24 to



31. All of the men in this group are reflections of the dominant ideal body type. They have extreme muscles developed from their neck to their calves.

As a group, they use the internet, on average, five and a half hours a week for non-work related activities. The average number of hours they watch television in a week is five. Collectively, this men view one to three movies in a month. These men chose their pseudo names as well. They will be referred to when necessary to the following to protect their anonymity: Anthony, Matt, Vin and Chuck.

#### Group 5 – The Gay Working/College Men

Seven homosexual men make up this group. Six out of the seven men in this group work full-time, while one man works part-time. Two of the men are full-time students and one is a part-time student at a Washington D.C. college or university; four are not currently students. The ages of these seven men fall between 21 and 35. The men in this group were evenly split in body type. Half of the men had slight bodies that had no evident muscularity while the other half had muscularity that resembled the magazine cover images. However, none of these men were built like the power lifters.

As a group, their internet use for non-work related activity averages to four hours a week. Collectively, they watch one more hour of television than they use the internet, five verses four respectively. On average, this group watches one to three movies in a month. One member watches slightly more at four to six movies in a month. These seven men chose their pseudo names and will be referred to when necessary to protect

their anonymity. These names are the following: George, Clay, Robert, Leonardo, Ryan, Will and Jake.

### Media and Exercise as Sources and Meaning of Masculinity

Collectively, the men said they volunteered for this study because some aspect of the study intrigued them and some felt it was important to represent their group in research such as this. However, answering the question of what masculinity means to them was new territory for most of them. The complete list of questions for the focus group sessions is listed in Appendix E.

Due to the fact that most, if not all, of the heterosexual men admit that they have never really given thought to the meaning of masculinity, the initial answers are expected to be brief and more first impressions than having any deep intellectual breath. The homosexual men's discussions are more insightful from the start of their session. Three engagement questions are asked in order to approach this new topic. Three relatively easy to answer questions at the beginning of the session allows the group to form a cohesive bond with each other. Once that bond is established other exploratory type questions stimulates more conversation between the members. Once the group feels like it has exhausted the topic the closing question wraps up the session.

### What Does Masculinity Mean?

When asked what five words best describe what it means to be masculine to them, all of the heterosexual men became flustered trying to remember what they wrote on their questionnaire. There was some nervous laughing by some men due to mild embarrassment of their loss of short term memory with remembering what they just wrote down on the questionnaire. While some expressed jokes to break up the silence in the room, the silence was short-lived. With some needed time to reflect, they were able to focus on how they wanted to begin the focus group discussions. The homosexual men did not have any difficulty answering the question.

The straight college men and the straight athletes began their conversation with no sissy stuff words, much like what they put on their questionnaire. Rather than repeating what the person before them said, as happened with the college men and the athletes, the straight power lifters seem to have sturdy oak and no sissy stuff type words. They gave words like maturity, integrity, beard, large, and courage. Thus, the power lifters have the most diverse group of words to describe masculinity. The consensus, though, for all three of these groups is that masculinity is best defined by the word strong, as in physical strength. Other key words that are mentioned in these groups are bravery, strong-willed, fearlessness, and being independent. Like the answers on the questionnaire, being physically strong seems to be the number one, first response answer to what masculinity means for all the members in these three groups.

In the initial discussion amongst the college men, each answer seemed to cause a little discourse before moving on to another discussion question. When Fry stated that he

thought intelligence was a word that described masculinity, the other men questioned it and made him qualify his statement. An excerpt of the exchange is the following:

Robert says “so is nerdy not masculine?”

Fry says “You can be incredibly intelligent but masculine but you know not if like your sporting really thick glasses.”

Robert says “Yeah, I feel like the egghead stereotype isn’t very masculine.”

One of the social cues present in this exchange is the facial expression of doubt from two of the men. It translated to Fry that the word intelligence was an unwelcome deviation from the previous answers given to this question. In order to reestablish him in the group, they asked him to explain his answer. In doing so, an establishment of understanding is created. At the end of this exchange, there was a consensus about the way nerds looked that did not meet the expectation of what they felt represented masculinity, which is a physically strong man.

The straight working men expressed the sentiment that all of the heterosexual groups struggled with. They stated that it was a difficult question for them to answer because they had not given it much thought. In order to answer the question, the men in this focus group restated what they put on the questionnaire. The working men believe the words that best define masculinity are strong and self-confident. Unlike the college men, they did not express any physical features or stereotypes to visually describe what masculinity did not look like in answering this first question.

When asked to define the words strong and self-confident, the group agreed that the word strong is a physical attribute of how a man walks and carried his body. Self-

confidence is described as an attitude that was more evident when you spoke to someone. Interestingly, none of the other groups mentioned being able to tell a man's masculinity from speaking to him as the working men did. The other groups focused on a man's physical appearance of strength to define the word masculinity.

The gay working/college men are very similar to the straight working men in how they define what masculinity is. To the gay men, masculinity has to do with a person's physical appearance as much as it has to do with their self-confidence. Physically, these men believe that a person who takes care of their body, i.e. not overweight, and is well groomed in appearance factors into their self-confidence. Accordingly, the more self-confidence a man has the more he is viewed as masculine. An excerpt from the discussion describes this.

Leonardo says "I feel like somebody who's more confident they have um better posture. They might have a little bit more of ah um stronger pronounced walk where somebody who maybe not as confident um they might slouch a little bit more or they're a little more hesitant in their walk."

Ryan says "I would say it's physical too. I think the better you look and that's not just physical but groomed um clothing not that you need to dress up expensive or you know anything like that but you should look confident."

Amongst the groups, there is a consensus that masculinity definitely has a physical component to its meaning. All of these men have a distinct image of what it looks like and how to recognize it. For example:

Brady says "Yes, you can tell by someone's face they're more masculine. Someone with a hard face is more masculine than someone with a baby face."

Maddog says "Yeah a baby face is not masculine at all."

All of the men consider older men more masculine than younger men. As expressed in the discussion amongst the gay men, maturity makes one appear more masculine. An excerpt of the conversation is below.

Clay says “The younger somebody seems in character I generally don’t associate as being an adult (pause) so that doesn’t necessarily translate as masculine to me.”

Will says “Yeah to a certain extent gray hair (pause) I think body mass typically not necessarily that you work out a lot but typically the older you get the more body mass you get so that translates into older and maybe more masculine um to me as well.”

Notably, the younger heterosexual men in the focus groups expressed their lack of feeling completely masculine. They felt that as they got older they would be more self-assured and confident. Through that, they would be more masculine.

In sum, the overarching word that defines masculinity to these men is the word strong, as in physical strength. Each of these men tries to identify himself in relation to that ideal. When men are seen as the opposite of being strong they not considered masculine. As men age they redefine masculinity as self-confidence and this compensates for any lack of strength. That self-confidence, however, is still tied to a man’s body through the way he walks or his body posture. These men feel that taking care of one’s body and not being overweight propels one’s self-confidence and exemplifies masculinity through the male body.

### Where Did The Meaning of Masculinity Come From?

While the questionnaire indicates that the most influential person in teaching the men masculinity is their father, the focus group discussions reveal the media has a larger role in the development of their understanding and socialization to masculinity than their fathers and male friends, which ranked first and second for the 27 men on the questionnaire. Despite the discourse focused on the media, some of the men did indicate in the discussion that their male friends, due to an absent father, do play a part in their socialization and confirmation of what masculinity is through peer group association.

Both the heterosexual and homosexual men indicate that they socialize with men who are like themselves, which reaffirms their perception of their own masculinity. For example, the heterosexual men in the group of lacrosse players, which for them is a very masculine sport, specifically associate with other lacrosse players and feel masculine when they do. When they do what they consider masculine activities, like watch sporting events on television with men similar to themselves, it provides them a sense of masculinity.

For the gay men, they did not provide specific examples like the heterosexual men do of those reaffirming masculine moments with their peers. Rather, they chose to focus the discussion on the lack of gay role models that are masculine in the media. Two excerpts of this discussion follow below.

George says “I would say watching TV and movies uh magazines uh TV that has a big influence in what is masculine.”

Leonardo says “Yeah, I think you see what is perceived as masculine and then um if you feel you can relate to that then that’s the kind of what your guide to uh for how you’re going to conduct yourself as far as your appearance um to others.”

Jake says “I think we all have movie stars that in some stage in our lives we idolize some of those people. If I can give an example, Patrick Swayze in Dirty Dancing, I think he looked very masculine in that movie.”

\*\*\*

Clay says “a lot of your perception is based on what you’re seeing.”

Leonardo says “yeah I agree with that. When I was young I didn’t know what the word gay meant for starters. It wasn’t something that was familiar in my family or that anybody talked about. I just thought some people looked more manly.”

Ryan says “One thing that stood out to me is thinking about Will & Grace and thinking of Jack from that show and how he was out there because we don’t have any gay role models that are seen as masculine. So TV goes with what the stereotypes are. So, I think that character projects the stereotypes of what people know to be gay and in the media for that then gay isn’t seen as masculine.”

As far as their father’s influence, 18 of the 27 men marked their father as the most important source of learning masculinity on their questionnaires. While the gay men did have a few members who mentioned the influence of their fathers later in the discussion when it came to exercise they did not discuss fathers at length. Their focus was the media. The straight college men and straight athletes did not mention their fathers at all as a source in the discussion. However, the common theme among these three groups is that movies and television influence how they perceived masculinity. An excerpt of the college men’s discussion follows:

Robert says “Um, probably movies. I mean male protagonists are usually very masculine I feel like.”



Ron says “Yeah, I put the same thing. Number one is movies. Specifically, uh Fight Club I think like was pretty big.”

(Group laughter and comradery)

Scooby says “That’s an awesome movie bra.”

The consensus for groups is that the hyper-masculine male portrayed in the movies is the best representation of what they were trying to convey to this researcher about what image is masculine. They mentioned specific examples of actors, such as Vin Diesel, Tom Cruise, and Matt Damon, as men who present the idealized form of masculinity.

In regards to the father influence, the straight working men discuss this the most. One man stated that he grew up without a father. So, his learning came from his friends, most of the time, and male coaches who were father figures. Another member of the working men offered that they did not learn what masculinity was by someone pointing out to them “this is masculine.” Rather, he was taught by his father what it was not. An excerpt from his answer is below.

Brady says “I was taught what was girly. You didn’t want to do anything that was girly. So, my dad would say don’t do that or that when a girl was doing it. I was never taught what masculinity was. It was just that I learned what it was by process of elimination.”

After this explanation from Brady, the rest of the working men agreed that most of what they were taught growing up was not actual masculinity. Rather it was what not to do and what it was not.

The power lifters seemed to be mixed in their answers of what sources provide the most influence. All four did agree that their fathers were the greatest influence and taught the most information about being masculine like the working men. In this group discussion, Anthony credits two other patriarchal “father” sources with his learning of masculinity. He states that a lot of his information comes from the Bible as well as the military. He indicates that it’s through his faith that he knows how to express his masculinity.

In sum, the key theme from the discussions in the focus groups about where the meaning of masculinity came from is twofold. First, as USAmerican boys and young men are socialized in the meaning of masculinity and how it should look, these ideas are not taught directly to them. Rather, USAmerican males are educated by their fathers, peers and other patriarchal sources about what masculinity is not and how it should not look. Noted by one of the members of the focus group, masculinity is learned through a process of elimination. The media reaffirms these patriarchal notions of masculinity through presentations of idealized versions of what is and what is not masculine. By learning what is feminine, they understand what is masculine. Second, through their processing, accepting and in some fashion trying to replicate that image or rejecting that image allows them to understand masculinity and define their position in relation to the dominant ideal.

### Do These Magazines Make Me Feel Wimpy?

When it comes to the specific influence of magazines on the perception and reception of masculinity, the results are mixed about how much of a part magazines play. Within the groups, a few themes arose out of the discussions of the magazines' influence on the men, such the purpose of the magazines, who would want to buy the magazines, etc. The main theme that garners the most discussion time, however, is social pressure.

Among the gay working/college men, there is a feeling that younger men experience definite pressure to look like the images on the magazines. However, as they age, the pressure is less because they are more self-confident and more comfortable with who they are.

Leonardo says "In the gay community there's much more pressure on people to look good because it's a more physical attraction when you meet somebody for the first time especially when you're young. I think as you grow older then like I said there's other things that you start looking for like the person must have a bit of a personality as well and not just look good."

Clay says "If you don't have your own self-confidence I think there is a lot of pressure um and I think the guys who aren't as sure of themselves um they probably feel the pressure a lot more. So, they're trying to find other ways to have that outward appearance um but your body may not be designed to get to that level."

Unlike the homosexual men, age is not mentioned amongst the heterosexual men as playing a factor in this perception of or lack of pressure. Most of the heterosexual men say they do not feel or see it as pressure to look like the images in the magazines. Some of them expressed that magazines help guide them to what they could look like or remind them to go to the gym.

Daniel says “It helps you build an image. Like if I was going after a girl that, like, only dated guys that look like this and I started hitting the gym then I’d be in the gym with this image in my head.”

President says “The images on the magazines help remind me of what I need to do. If I see one at the store, I think, Oh I really need to get back to the gym.”

However, some of them confirm that the women in their lives make them try to be like the images. They likened this to pressure but did not feel it qualified as intense as the pressure they experienced from their peers during adolescence.

Two of the men stood out in their discussions because their feelings were palpable and unexpected. George, one of the younger males, in the athletic group, expressed anger toward the magazines. Rather than placing blame on the magazines directly for the pressure he feels, Brady in the straight working men group places his anger and blame on women in general.

George says “Yes they have an influence. They tell you what you’re supposed to look like and how to be like that and the girls expect that.”

Brady says “There is pressure but it comes from the women’s magazines. It’s the women that make us feel pressure to look like the men on covers we’re looking at here.”

During the discussion about how much magazine influences them or put pressure on them, Red, in the working men group, began to visibly show his disagreement with the group. He began to look down at the table, swivel in his chair and shake his head. It took him several minutes in the discourse to engage.

Red says “No, I don’t think the magazines have any bearing on what masculinity is. I think that a person’s body has nothing to do with masculinity. It is all self-confidence.”

The deviation from the group created by Red's opinion caused a shift in the progression of the topic. Hart's facial expression and the nodding of his head when Red spoke to the group indicated that he agreed with Red's statement. However, Hart offered nothing to back up Red's claim. The other men noticed that Red was visibly uncomfortable before he spoke out against the group. They chose to validate Red's position by offering similar agreement type statements, such as "yes I agree" or "yes that is definitely true".

These types of social reassurances of group members' masculinity occurred throughout the discussions. The vast majority of the time when the men are providing their opinions they become more conscious of the effects of what they are saying on the group after a member offers a dissenting opinion. In order to maintain, social cohesion of the group, more often than not, the men would agree with each other and withhold personal opinions that they may have indicated on the questionnaire.

In sum, the social pressure that the men expressed that is coming from their peers, their community or the women in their lives to embody this idealized body found on the magazine covers seems to cause the most distress for these men. This ideal image of what masculinity is forces them to measure themselves against it. When they compare themselves to their peers, 44 percent of these men believe themselves to be more masculine than their peers, as indicated on their questionnaires. Forty-eight percent of these men believe they are no more or less masculine than their peers. So, the social pressure for these men to conform the idealized body which is projected on magazine

covers and in media in general is palpable to these men and they have to accommodate it, emulate it, or compensate for their lack of it.

### How Does Exercise Play a Role in Masculinity?

The extent to which exercise factors into a man's masculinity is a passionate topic for the men in this study. Some men find that men who go to the gym too much should not be taken seriously. Some of the men that go to the gym do so specifically to participate in a sport, which requires exercise to build muscles, and feel that they are the exceptions to the average man. Others feel that participating in exercise is an expression of how well you take care of yourself, which is a direct expression of how masculine you are. As indicated on their questionnaire, 59 percent of these men believe that men who exercise are more masculine than men that do not.

In the straight working men group, this discussion shows the polarity of opinions and the discomfort the men become when the outspoken men, who represent the ideal body type, are faced with dissenting opinions from the men who are the least like the dominant ideal body type. Maddog, one of the men whose body closely approximates the dominant ideal, is firm in his belief that not being in shape is not masculine, at all. On the other hand, Red, whose body departs from the dominant ideal, is firm in his belief that exercise has nothing to do with masculinity. An excerpt of the discussion is below.

Maddog says "If I see another guy walking towards me and I can tell he takes care of his body and he has a strong face, I think he is more masculine than a guy that doesn't take care of himself and looks wimpy."

President says “I wish I had more time to work out but I’m a new dad. I change diapers, which other people don’t think is masculine at all.”

Red says “No, I think its self-confidence not exercise.”

Notably, Hart’s lack of involvement with the discussion, based on his body language, signals to this researcher that he did not want to create another uncomfortable situation for the group. His physical appearance may have played a part in his lack of engagement. Out of all of the men, his body physique resembled the body type the men were discussing as being non-masculine. However, on his questionnaire he indicated he exercises at least three to four times a week.

The gay working/college men believe that exercise definitely plays a part in masculinity. When you exercise, these men believe that it causes one to feel more self-confident. However, if someone exercises too much then they are overcompensating for something. According to Will, “people that obviously look after their bodies well by going to the gym by not necessarily playing sports or something to um keep their bodies like it is have more self-confidence.” Jake says “if somebody has I guess gone over a certain line as far as how much attention they give to their body to me stands out as not masculine.” So, for this group, there is a fine line between exercising for self-confidence and extreme over zealousness for paying too much attention to one’s body size.

The straight college men also have an issue with men who have what they perceive as extreme bodies. In particular, this is the group that finds men, such as body builders who have bodies that are extreme, should not be taken seriously as masculine.

Robert says “I feel like they’re over the top like they don’t have their priorities straight if they’re hitting the gym that much to look like that. There are other things that are much more important I feel like so I almost kind of laugh at them”.

Scooby says “It’s kind of like ah yeah you’re a masculine guy. That’s cool but alright.”

Fry says “You can beat me up but I don’t care.” (Laughter in the room). I’m not going to get in a fight with you.”

The straight athletes reiterated that exercise has a lot to do with their masculinity and getting women to be attracted to them. They exercise in order to appear like the images they see because they believe through experience that women will not go on dates with them if they look “fat”. So, this group has respect for men that exercise and believe it helps others identify their masculinity if they do. In particular, one man who works at a gym part-time believes that it is better to look overly masculine with a good body than to “walk around looking like a guy that cannot pick up a rock.”

The power lifters see themselves as exceptions to the rule of how much an average man can be masculine through exercise. The exercising the power lifters do is a way of life for them. They exercise in order to participate in specific sports that require great strength or power. They feel that it is an expression to others that they care about their health.

Anthony says “It expresses that I want to be healthy and that I understand I need to take care of myself um for myself and my family.”

Chuck says “It allows me to compete in strength sports and show how strong I am.”

Overall, these discussions show the extreme in opinions about how much exercise plays a factor in masculinity. Almost all the men agree that exercise signals to others the



level of commitment a man has to being masculine. Each group has a sense of what exercise means to achieving or maintaining the body that they have or want to have. Those that do not exercise at all or as much as they would like to exercise have indicated in the group sessions that they have a self-consciousness about not being as masculine as others. They justify to their peers reasons why they are not able to exercise as much as they believe they should in order to socially negotiate their failure in not meeting the ideal. Those that do exercise, the aspiring males, insist on the notion that they have a higher amount of self-confidence than they believe those that do not exercise have. The dominant ideal is perpetuated through exercise.

#### Are Magazine Images Attainable?

In this part of the focus group discussion, the groups are asked to look at five covers from magazines in the study that are directed toward men with the sexual orientation of the men in the group. This means that the straight college men, the straight athletes, the straight working men and the straight power lifters are asked to view five magazine covers as a group from *Men's Health* magazine or *Men's Fitness* magazine. The gay working/college men are asked to review five magazine covers from *Out* magazine or *Instinct* magazine as a group.

The power lifters have already attained the images they see on the magazine covers. So not surprisingly, they affirm that it is possible to look like the images on the magazine covers. They stated that the average man could not achieve this. It is a way of

life for them, and they believe that unless you commit your life to a sport such as power lifting, the average man should not expect his body will look like the magazine covers.

Amongst the other groups, however, none of those men looked like the images on the magazine covers in this study's sample. Also, the members within each of the groups shared the same sentiment with other members of their respective groups about whether these images were attainable. Comparing across groups, however, the idea that men could achieve the bodies that are shown on magazine covers was not unanimous. Most notably, the age of the men has considerable impact on the way that they answered this particular question.

Unlike the sentiment of the straight college men and athletes, the straight working men believe that not only are the images attainable, but they have a sense of what it takes to accomplish the physical demands that factor into looking like the magazine cover images. To these men, they see the job behind the model's body. An excerpt from the discussion is below.

Alex says "If all I had to do was workout all day, I could look like that. This is their job to look like that."

Brady says "Yeah they are definitely attainable for the average guy."

Jeep says "Um yeah I think you could definitely look like that if you try and um really have the time to put into it."

Maddog says "I agree with what they said. If it was my job to look like that I uh it's definitely achievable."

The college men and the athletes echoed the same sentiments that not only are the image not attainable, they do not believe anybody should want to look like that if they

wanted to be taken seriously as masculine. This attitude of the athletes is fueled by their need to be agile and not cumbersome by an excessive amount of upper muscularity to participate in their sport. Further, the athletes believe that the men are overcompensating for something if they have to be “that muscular”.

Daniel says “I’ve met a lot of guys uh I mean they’re 230 pounds of pure muscle. I mean like less than five percent body fat and they’ll be willing to tell you that and normally that’s one of the first things they’re willing to tell you that (pause) as far as masculinity scale they take a huge drop right there”

Bruce says “yeah I feel like a lot of those guys are insecure in their image that’s why they try to look like this so I think that makes them even less masculine”

Brad says “Yeah their over compensating”

Jim says “Yeah I have an old high school gym teacher that can’t touch his shoulders he’s so big”. (Group laughter).

The college men have a similar jovial conversation, but are less direct in their rejection of the men on the magazines. They provided reasons of why they felt the way that they did, which have the same underlying sentiment as the athletes. An excerpt from their conversation is below.

Scooby says “I think it gives you like a good like this is as good as you could look if you really were that interested in vanity. It’s one of those things like if I really dedicated my life to being in shape I would probably want to look like some of these guys.”

Robert says “Yeah I feel like” (interrupted)

Ron says “I think it helps you build an image of what going to the gym is about but like you actually need a different inspiration to decide to go to the gym in the first place like for girls but it’s not like I see these um this and I’m like oh I need to go to the gym.”

Robert says “I don’t really feel like I should be like that. I’m kind of just like why look like that? Why bother if women can’t have a guy that looks like that uh

I um well, if women really want a guy that looks like that and their not willing to sacrifice I'm like well they aren't my type of girl."

Fry says "I think anyone can take steroids. (Laughter). It's pretty easy."

Notably, the gay working/college men seem to have an awareness of the lack of information that is provided by the magazines to achieve a body like the ones that grace the covers of magazines that the heterosexual groups did not mention. They believe the muscularity in the models is achievable to a certain extent and it has much to do with age.

Clay says "I would love to attain it for myself. I think I can get there to a certain extent but not (laughs) as far as these people do."

Leonardo says "Whether it's these images or if you know somebody like that they (pause) the gym is more their life and more than having a social aspect (pause) I don't think that anybody should expect that this is usually attainable unless that's the field that allows you to work on your body like that."

George says "Yeah, I don't think that that is put out there um to people without any um additional information put into how much of what is (pause) how much of this person's life is spent at the gym, what are their eating habits. I mean it has to be an extreme commitment to get yourself to this point and an average person's life, I don't think they have the time or pride or commitment to this point."

In sum, age appears to factor in to the notion of whether the idealized body type, found on the covers of the magazines, is attainable or not. The younger heterosexual men in the focus groups reject the ideal body type because they view it as unattainable. Therefore, they do not believe that one should aspire to be like images on the magazine covers. Juxtaposed to that notion, however, they will subject themselves to attempting to emulate the idealized body type in order to get women to find them attractive enough to date them. The older men of the groups, both heterosexual and homosexual, believe that

these images are attainable and have a sense of what lifestyle one needs to engage in to attain those idealized bodies.

### How Do the Media Impact Your Perception?

Among the groups, the discussion about how media, in general, impact masculinity varied from group to group. The key theme that is expressed throughout the focus group discussions is not how much magazines play a part in defining masculinity. Rather, it's how much television and movies play a part in reinforcing an ideal type of masculinity. Some find the images laughable while others find that it does have an important impact in how one is supposed to think about what masculinity looks like.

The gay working/college men have no question about how much the media impact their view of masculinity, particularly as they were moving through their adolescent years. It is not something they reflected on in their youth. However, during the discussion they are able to consider how much it did impact them as they reflect back to that time. An excerpt of the discussion is below.

Leonardo says "yeah I think so. I think um whether I realized it or not just over the years (pause) whether it was the media that came first and I developed to that or um I developed my own way and then I just gravitate towards what I see in myself from the media. I think that the media plays a big part in that."

Ryan says "Yes definitely. Vin Diesel (pause) some of his movies were very masculine because of his power and because of how he conducts himself (pause) obviously it's a load of crap because it's a movie but you say to yourself gee I'd like to be like this person because everything he does is good. He drives fast, jumps over cliffs, his hair style is the same after he does all of this, bombs explode and he just dusts himself off. I think that the media has a huge influence on how we see masculinity."

In the straight athletic group, they dismissed the idea that the media give them the idea of what is masculinity. Rather, as they progressed through the ninety minutes reflecting on and discuss masculinity, they concluded that what is presented in the media is a reflection of the type of masculinity that they have learned from their peers or their fathers. They did not believe that media influenced them or changed their ideas of masculinity.

The straight college men and power lifters have mixed feelings about how much the media play a part in providing their understanding of masculinity. Specifically, two of the college men are dismissive about media defining masculinity. One of the power lifters admits that media do have influence. The others are reluctant to admit that influence. An excerpt of the discussions is below.

Scooby says "I think a lot of people watch movies and get the idea of like masculinity from movies. At the same time, you can watch movies and laugh at the guys that like if they are trying to be masculine or over masculine. It comes off as like hilarious. It's not actual."

Robert says "I hate to say it does but it probably does. It's just in our culture. I try not to buy into uh anything I see on TV but uh it's not real but uh you see James Bond and any guy's like it'd be cool to be like that."

\*\*\*

Anthony says "It plays a lot in how I express my own masculinity. It makes me realize that true masculinity is not how big ones muscles are or whether or not I have a six pack, or the type of diet that I have"

Chuck says "I mean I watch a lot of TV. So, yeah it definitely tells you what masculinity is supposed to be like but yeah for me personally, it doesn't play as much in my life as my family does. I'd say about 25%."

Overall, these men selected movies, on their questionnaire, as the third most important source from which they learned masculinity. Television ranks fourth as the

most important source form which they learned masculinity, while magazines rank lower. The key is that there is an overarching notion amongst a majority of the men that the media, particularly television and movies, do play a part in their understanding of masculinity. Some are more aware of the influence, while others reject the notion that they are influenced by the images they are confronted with in the media. So, in one form or another, as a collective group, they recognize that media play a part in at least providing a reflection of or a form of an understanding of masculinity. That masculinity, as seen on the covers of the magazines in this study, comprises of a body conforming to the dominant ideal.

### Discussion

Between the hours they watch television and movies, the hours they use the internet for non-work related activity, and the number of magazines they come in contact with on a weekly or monthly basis as indicated on their questionnaire responses, men have an inordinate amount of opportunity to come face to face with the idealized body image of USAmerican masculinity. As noted in Chapter three, this image is white and muscular sculpted by natural or artificial means to emulate the perfection of the human male body. These depictions represent an ideal physique that is idealized not only in contemporary society but appears throughout Western history. Michelangelo's "David", depictions of gods in Greek mythology such as Zeus and Hercules and statues of pharaohs in Ancient Egypt are examples of much earlier periods in history that depict an

ideal physique. Ideal images can even be found in religious art (Boyle, 2010). Today perfect, idealized bodies are found on the covers of magazines, in movies, on television and in professional sports. These images are in all aspects of social life. When these men come in contact with these images, an affirmation of ideas of masculinity is further ingrained in them and in social consciousness. Its pervasiveness makes people believe that it is a natural state of the human male body. Thus, a majority of the men in this study believe this idealized body is attainable.

These men express in their discussions that as boys and young men they are socialized in the meaning of masculinity. However, these ideas are not taught directly to them. Rather, they are educated by their fathers, peers and other members of society about what masculinity is not and how it should not look. Noted by one of the members of the focus group, masculinity is learned through a process of elimination. By learning what is feminine, they understand what is masculine. The processing and accepting of that image allows them to define masculinity and define their position relative to the dominant ideal.

As they mature, these men go through a process of recognition, realization, rejection and/or acceptance of what masculinity is and what represents it. As children, they learn to identify modes of behavior, attitudes and images of masculinity presented repetitiously through the media they consume as entertainment. These images form impressions upon them as things that they want to emulate. As a member of the focus groups stated a child looks at these images and wants to be like the one that impressed them the most.



As the men grow older and begin to consume a broader spectrum of entertainment and information, the lessons of masculinity they learned as children remain. The interaction with their peers forces assessment of their own masculinity as it relates to the images they consume and as it relates to their peers and other men in society. It is through these social interactions that embodying the idealized body becomes a measure through which they begin to classify each other and themselves as masculine or not-masculine.

As college-age men, these men experience different degrees of social pressure to resemble the images that are presented in the media. Heterosexual men and homosexual men at this age are body-focused because sexuality is prominent in their social interactions. For homosexual men in this study, the pressure as young men to replicate the images found on magazines is a palpable one that, as stated by Ryan in his focus group session, “comes from the gay community.” The members of the focus group state that because there is more pressure to make a good first impression a person’s physical appearance is the most important projection of someone’s masculinity or lack of masculinity.

The heterosexual men do not perceive the pressure from a community like the homosexual men do. However, the discourse of the focus groups suggests they do feel pressure from women directly or from the perception of what women want physically in a male body. As indicated in one of the focus group sessions, a heterosexual man who cannot or chooses not to meet this idealized body form rejects it through a defense of reasoning. They feel a discomfort when seeing other men who replicate the ideal, but to

save themselves from further discomfort they brush it off or equate those men as caricatures rather than real men. As the men get older, their consumption of the idealized body image and their need to meet that ideal begins to wane.

The overall sense from these focus groups is that masculinity is shown through a man's body. They are socialized by others about how masculinity is represented through a man's body. These men believe that the most descriptive word to define masculinity is strong, as in physical strength. Exercise plays an integral part in how men manifest this idealized body. Through exercise, they can attain and embody the idealized form they see represented on magazine covers and in the media in general. Those men who did not or could not meet the ideal in their youth become complicit with that ideal. They no longer reject it nor do they try to emulate it. They accept that it exists and reap benefits from it when it presents itself in the social interactions they have in their daily lives with men who represent it even less than they do. So, regardless of where they fall within the masculine hierarchy, they are all aware of and influenced by the idealized body type existing in US American society.

## CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSION

### Discussion

For Western societies like the U.S., gender is socially constructed through patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity and the appropriate gendered behaviors for people in these binary categories. The social constraints of how gender is understood solidify the gendered order of society. This gendered order of society is hierarchical, and this hierarchy pervades all aspects of social life. It is through socialization and ongoing practices that these understandings come to be taken as normative and thought of as natural.

While men as a group have dominated women as a group, some women have made strides in blurring that dominance in various facets of social life. Some women have gained higher employment status and positions of influence in professional fields. Many women have gained economic autonomy. Economic independence brings women a measure of control over their sexuality allowing more sexual autonomy. A combination of economic, social, sexual and emotional autonomy for women creates a situation in which to promote more egalitarian understandings of gender.

With a shift toward more egalitarianism regarding gender, understandings of masculinity and femininity begin to blur. In Chafetz's conceptualization of masculinity, the areas in which women have made strides have eliminated six of the seven dimensions of masculinity she proposed in her 1974 benchmark work regarding masculinity in USAmerican society. The element that remains as differentiating masculinity from femininity is the physical dimension, the body. While there are exceptions, such as women body builders and power lifters who successfully emulate the muscularity of the male body, the physical body, in particular, male musculature remains a basis for social differentiation between genders.

Against this framework the research discussed here attempted to answer two broad sets of questions:

What do men's magazines convey about the meaning of masculinity in USAmerican society? How do men's magazines convey the understanding of masculinity as centered on the body? What is the content of this bodily understanding of masculinity? How do men consume popular images of masculinity?

How do men understand masculinity for themselves? To what extent is men's personal understanding of masculinity centered on the body? To what extent do men's understandings of masculinity emulate the idealized masculine body, challenge it, or stand in other more complex relations to it?

The discussion of men's comprehension of masculinity and the how it manifested in the focus groups will be described before discussing how magazines convey masculinity.

### Hierarchical Structure of Masculinity

In order to understand how the body is an agent of masculinity, one must first appreciate the hierarchical structure of masculinity. As presented by Connell throughout her research, masculinity is characterized by a hierarchy: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized masculinities are in relation to one another. Hegemonic masculinity sits at the top of the hierarchy. It is the most honored and ideal form of masculinity in relation to which all other men are positioned. It is based on power and an ideology that justifies the global subordination of women to men (Connell, 2005). The hegemonic ideal within this context is based on the heterosexual male being the norm. Furthermore, it is a white heterosexual male exemplar with economic power and authority that embodies the hegemonic ideal (Perry, 2001; Kendall, 2000; Benwell, 2003, Connell, 2005) in US American society.

Hegemonic masculinity does not mean that all men, because they are men, are equal in their domination in gendered society. A hierarchical structure of masculinity exists. One type of masculinity can be subordinated to another based on the overarching ideology that exists in society, which may base subordination on race, social class or sexual preference. In the same vein, this is not saying that men of color, working class men or gay men are oppressed or subordinate because of their race, social class or sexual preference in all situations. It is through exemplars that hegemonic masculinity's authority is symbolized and continually serves as an idealistic representation of masculinity. A very small number of men can ever hope to achieve this masculinity in its idealized form.

The forms of masculinity that most men fall into are one of the three other masculinities: complicit, marginalized, or subordinate. Complicit men are men who may exhibit some physical characteristics of the hegemonic masculine ideal, but do not have the social power or skill that would propel him into a higher standing in the hierarchy of the social structure. However, they gain advantages because of the existence of the hegemonic ideal. For example, if they exhibit some physical representation of the hegemonic ideal, they receive the social status and social privileges that accompany that status. While they recognize the limitations on their capacity to change the inequality that exists for them because they cannot attain that hegemonic ideal, they take advantage of gender inequalities and accept them as a normal aspect of social life.

While the subordination of women manifests through social practices such as devaluation of stay-at-mothers, “mommy tracks” in corporate America or unequal pay, a man’s subordination to another man takes other forms. For example, among masculinities, a homosexual man’s masculinity is subordinate to a heterosexual man’s masculinity because his sexual preference is other men. Connell asserts, “Gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (2005, 78).

In the hierarchy of masculinities, however, a gay man’s masculinity can be either subordinate or dominant depending on the social context in which his masculinity is being measured against others. For some homosexual men, it means adhering to an extreme form of dominant or idealized masculinity in order to avoid subordination. They exhibit a hyper-masculine body and compensate for their sexual preference for men by rejecting the most effeminate homosexual males in order to distance themselves from

being seen as effeminate (Clarkson, 2006; Levine, 1998). Through the display of extreme muscularity of their bodies, they can present themselves in society as dominate when others do not know their sexual preference and are making social judgments based on outward appearances.

### The Manifestation of the Masculine Hierarchy in Small Groups

As asked in the research, to what extent do men's understandings of masculinity emulate the idealized masculine body, challenge it, or stand in other more complex relations to it, the answer is as complex as the question but it centers around the body. As found in this study, the manifestation of various types of masculinity appears in the social interaction amongst individuals and in groups. The 27 research subjects, who are all white middle class males, were purposively selected for those characteristics. The focus groups were set up to include men of the same sexual orientation. Due to this, one might be under the false impression that no hierarchy of masculinity would exist. After all, they were not competing with women or racial/ethnic minorities for social status or power. They were just a homogeneous group of white men sitting around a table having a conversation about masculinity. It begets the question: if all of these men can, in the larger society, be seen as privileged, how could the existence of masculine hierarchy manifest in these small groups?

Masculine domination is based on a hierarchical structure of gender relations and power within those relations. Within groups, that structure manifests based on the social cues a person presents to others of his social position within the larger social structure.

When small groups gather, such as these focus groups, a person's physical body becomes an agent of these social norms and practices that are shared by the larger society. Connell (2009) calls this the social embodiment. The body becomes a means for which society conveys the hierarchical social structure and its ideology. As stated by Connell, "Social embodiment involves an individual's conduct, but also may involve a group, an institution or a whole complex of institutions" (2009, 67), through which society reifies the social structural norms of the dominate ideology of gender.

In each of the focus groups, there were a few men that dominated the discussion. Due to this dominance, a social hierarchy became apparent in the focus groups. The dominate men, who most closely resembled the ideal masculine body image in the groups, were the older men and had more body mass than the other men. These men were the most athletically built physically. Through their own discourse and interaction, these focus groups created the social hierarchy that exemplifies the social relations of the dominant masculinity with complicit and subordinated masculinities.

The interaction among the dominant men, subordinate men, and the men who benefit from approximating or being complicit with the dominant ideal is illuminated in the communication these groups members have with one another. The most concrete example of this is the Straight Working Men group. Out of the six members of this group, the subordinated men are Red and Hart. Red and Hart are the least physically fit of the six men in the focus group. Red is tall and thin with no obvious signs of muscular development. Hart is slightly over-weight and no obvious signs of muscular development. They are the two who did not fit the profile of the other men in the group.



The other four members of the group fall into the complicit and dominant categories. The complicit males of the group are President and Jeep. While they are not as physically athletic as Maddog or Brady, their physical body structure indicated to the other men that they had been physically fit in the recent past. Their dominant or hegemonic counterparts were Maddog and Brady, who are the most physically fit men of the group. Maddog and Brady are known amongst the group members of being most concerned about being muscular.

Much like in the larger society, the dominant male's opinions are the focus of the discussion. The other members chose to wait for Brady and Maddog to speak before interjecting their own opinion into the discussion. When President and Jeep had a few opposing thoughts, they hesitated in speaking up. When they did speak up, they qualified their statements with "I know it's not masculine but" statements. They waited for reassurance from Brady or Maddog that their masculinity was not damaged by such statements. Maddog usually confirmed their status was intact with a reassuring statement of agreement, such as "oh that's masculine." It became a different dynamic when Red spoke up in opposition to the others. Instead of agreeing with the rest of the group, Red attempts to assert himself as an authority and redirect the group conversation. At the same time, he is aware of his subordination within the group and showed this by speaking to the table rather than making eye contact with anyone in the group. Due to this, he could not overcome the dominant opinion in the group and his statements were dismissed not only because they deviate from the norm but they create a shift in the social hierarchy of the group based on an idealized form of masculinity.

### Verbalizing Their Perception of Masculinity

As found in this study, the concept of masculinity exists within a heterosexual context of masculinity and femininity. The extent to which men feel they are acknowledged as masculine in the U.S. is based on how they present and perform the socially prescribed norms of masculinity in relation to and amongst other men. There are some men that are more successful at this performance than others. Those who are less successful in achieving the idealization of masculinity they believe exists in society feel the need to compensate for it in other ways. They recognize that each person is measured against a continuum of masculinity (and femininity), which creates a social placement for them within the hierarchical social order of gender.

As a way conceptualizing their perceptions, Brannon's (1976) four-fold categorization of masculine characteristics (Alexander, 2003; Smiler, 2004) was used to analyze the words the men in the study use to describe USAmerican masculinity and their sense of how their masculinity is perceived by others. On the questionnaire, the men first provided words to describe USAmerican masculinity. The findings suggest that sexual orientation influences the way these men perceive masculinity in the U.S. Neither straight nor gay men have any strong association of their masculinity with financial success or aggressive or dominating behavior. The majority of words that were used by the heterosexual men fall into the "sturdy oak" category, i.e. those that describe strength and emotional detachment. Overwhelmingly, the words that were used by the homosexual men to describe masculinity fall into the "no sissy stuff" category, i.e. words that are not associated with femininity. Men's conceptualizations of the meaning of

USAmerican masculinity reveal how they as individuals view the masculine ideal against which they measure themselves and others.

When discussing words to describe USAmerican masculinity in the focus groups, age rather than sexual orientation emerged as the basis for differing views of what words best represent USAmerican masculinity. The younger men, the straight college men and the straight athletes, used more words that fall into the “no sissy stuff” category; words such as large, beard, thick, and macho, which focus on the body. The older men in the straight working men group, the straight power lifter group, and the gay working/college men group used more “sturdy oak” words to describe USAmerican masculinity; words such as bravery, courage, rational, and resourceful. Rather than indicating the body as the sole source of USAmerican masculinity, the older men coupled the physical aspect of that masculinity with self-confidence. According to these men, self-confidence is revealed by the way a man walks and carries his body or comes out when he speaks.

Thus, the answer to the question, to what extent is men’s personal understanding of masculinity centered on the body, is it is high. Among all groups, the body figures in communicating one’s masculinity, whether it is strength shown through muscularity or the way a man carries himself and moves through the world. These men connect USAmerican masculinity to the physical body.

While the questionnaire reveals that the heterosexual men’s perception of USAmerican masculinity contrasts with the homosexual men’s perception of USAmerican masculinity, they agree on what physical form represents that masculinity. The most common word that identifies masculinity in the total sample of men is “strong,”

in physical strength. They agree that the physical form of muscularity emulates the idealized masculine body. They can conceptualize it through actual examples such as actors. Vin Diesel, Matt Damon and Brad Pitt are what they said embody this idealized form of masculinity. It is the muscular, hyper-masculine male portrayed in film that best represents the ideal image of masculinity.

#### The Perception of Personal Masculinity as Seen Through the Eyes of Others

So, how do men understand masculinity for themselves? When asked on the questionnaire to assess their own masculinity through the eyes of people they know, sexual orientation and age again influence how these men answered this question. The heterosexual men describe themselves through the eyes of others with “no sissy stuff words.” The homosexual men believe other people would describe their own masculinity with “sturdy oak” words. As it did in how they describe USAmerican masculinity, the word “strong,” in physical strength, appears most often in the responses from the total sample with regard to others’ perceptions of their own masculinity.

The contrasts in the ways heterosexual men and homosexual men perceive others’ views of their masculinity and their views of USAmerican masculinity in general are profoundly interesting. There is a double contrast at work here. Heterosexual men are attuned to social perception of their masculinity as that which is not feminine; they describe themselves through the eyes of others with “no sissy stuff” words. The homosexual men understand this not-feminine characterization as representing

USAmerican masculinity in general. As the men indicated in the focus groups, this is what their fathers, peers and other agents of socialization taught them about masculinity.

In contrast, homosexual men are attuned to the social perception that men of their sexual orientation are feminized by society. Through the tension with this feminizing masculinist ideological society, they assert others' views of their masculinity as related to strength and emotional detachment, i.e. the "sturdy oak" words. This strength and detachment is what the heterosexual men describe as representing general USAmerican masculinity. Thus, while all of these men were exposed to the same heterosexual ideological view of masculinity, how they internalize masculinity is different. Homosexual men believe their masculinity projects something to others that is emotionally detached and having strength. Heterosexual men internalize an understanding of masculinity that leads them to believe they project a masculinity that is as distinct from femininity as possible, which they express through not-feminine, "no sissy stuff" words.

In terms of masculinity and aging, both homosexual and heterosexual men suggest that physical weakness is not considered masculine. So, they must compensate in some way as they age in order to ease the tension between their view of masculinity and their place within that perception of masculinity. As they get older and can no longer or chose not to try to achieve the physical representation of masculinity they idealize, they compensate by tying physical attributes, the way a man walks or his body posture, to self-confidence. However, the physical body remains the means through which most of the men in the sample judge their own and other men's masculinity.

### Conveying a Meaning of Masculinity through Magazines

Through consumerism, USAmericans are overwhelmed with media images in daily life. Images on television, in films, and in magazines repeat the idealized forms of how a male and female body should look. Magazines, in particular, make use of cover pages to showcase the most important images the producers of the magazines want the viewer to see and consume. The consumption of the images is the focus of the study of the magazine covers.

Typically, white men own and operate magazines, as seen with the four magazines used in this study, and dominate the content in magazines and on the covers. Producers of this content purposively select what they believe is the best representation of the male body to be consumed by all who view it. Notably, none of the models on the 104 covers in the sample had visible signs of even the slightest physical deformities. In addition, the producers of the magazine content, if not the models themselves, modified those already seemingly perfect bodies to make the images appear “more perfect” by removing chest hair to accentuate chest muscles and/or removing underarm hair to make the biceps more visually appealing. The perfected body image on magazine covers is overwhelmingly that of a white muscular male shown from his head to his mid-thigh with little or no clothing, which puts the idealized body in the forefront for consumption.

So, what do men’s magazines convey about the meaning of masculinity in USAmerican society? Through this commonly found, often modified, representation of the male body, the magazines are conveying the social message that this is the idealized muscular body in relation to which all men should measure their masculinity. This

dominant ideal body type is, as Ellexis Boyle writes, "...based upon a normative identity of the white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied male" (2010, 155). It is through these magazine covers that whiteness is reiterated as a natural representation of humanity in mainstream society. As Pamela Perry asserts, "therein lies the toxicity of the construction of white as the (cultureless) norm: it serves as a basis on which to measure the humanity and social standing of others" (2001, 60).

Due to the magazines' availability to any member of society, man or woman, those dominant ideals will find their way either directly or peripherally into men's view. To bolster that, these magazine images are often those of actors or celebrities esteemed in popular culture. Through imagery, men are being exposed to the notion that a key to their masculinity depends on their physical appearance. These images of the body are not passive objects on display; they exert power over a person's self-image (Alexander, 2003). Through a deliberate manipulation of the natural state of a man's body, imagery in media centers the focus of masculinity on the body and places emphasis on the muscularity of the body. This leads to the answer to the question: what is the content of this bodily understanding of masculinity? With an overabundance of exposure to the same images throughout the daily lives of men, the social perception of how one's body measures up to the ideal is reiterated. Thus, the body becomes an agent of social structural ideology, which is transferred through individuals, groups and institutions (Connell, 2009).

So, whether men pick up a magazine or turn on the television, that masculine ideal body is being presented to them. With such influence on how people are socialized,

images presented in (but not limited to) magazines have powerful influence on the social comparisons men in US American society make regarding masculinity – their own, with their peers, and to idealized men represented in the media. The socialization of these idealized concepts of the body leads people to distort their perceptions of what physical traits are desirable (Jacobi and Cash, 1994). Those distorted perceptions then find their way into how men understand their own masculinity.

### Consumption of Popular Images of Masculinity

How do men consume popular images of masculinity? The use of electronic and print media to connect with aspects of social life provides men ample opportunities to come in contact with images that are similar to the ideal masculine body found on the magazine covers in this study. Specifically, this study found that over 81 percent of the men in this sample use the internet more than four hours a week, some in excess of seven to 10 hours a week, for activities not related to their jobs. Seventy percent of the men spend up to six hours of their week watching television and watch between one and three movies in a month. Over half of the sample read one to three magazines in a month. With this exposure to images that provide hints about masculinity, how they receive the message and what they interpret as the message has an impact on their own view of masculinity.

When the message in media about masculinity was discussed in the focus groups, the majority of men affirmed that the media projects notions of masculinity through presentations of an idealized version of what is and is not masculine. In particular, the



gay working/college men group stated they feel that the images presented in the media are a reflection of a heterosexual masculine understanding on which USAmerican society is based. In their focus group session, they addressed the fact that masculine gay role models are lacking in the media. They state that there are only stereotypes of what society expects gay men to be, which are not masculine.

This corresponds to a similar question asked on the questionnaire. Men were asked if the images in the media represent the words they used to describe masculinity in the U.S. Overwhelmingly, they answered yes. Twenty out of the 27 men said the words they listed reflect the masculinity they see in magazine cover images. Eighteen in the total sample said they believe the words they chose are represented in the images of masculinity they see on television shows. Twenty four out of the 27 men indicate that the words they designated for masculinity in the U.S. is represented in the images they see in their favorite film genre. Thus, these images, with which all of the men in the sample spend considerable time, contribute to the dissemination of and reaffirm an understanding of masculinity that stems from the dominant USAmerican ideology, valuing heterosexuality and idealized muscularity.

### The Actualization of the Idealized Masculine Body

The possibility for men to transform their bodies in ways that emulate the ideal masculine body type is both affirmed and denied by the men in the sample. The men in this study were asked to look at five covers from magazines in this cover sample that were directed toward men of their sexual orientation. The straight college men, the

straight athletes, the straight working men and the straight power lifters were asked to view five magazine covers from *Men's Health* magazine or *Men's Fitness* magazine and discuss them as a group. The gay working/college men were asked to review five magazine covers from either *Out* magazine or *Instinct* magazine and discuss those as a group. Assuming that achieving such a look requires work, the questionnaire asked men their attitudes about exercise and the reasons they exercise.

Overall, the 59 percent of the sample believe that men who exercise are more masculine than those that do not. The most common reason given to why they exercise is to maintain their fitness level. All, except one, of the men in the sample exercise at least one day a week. The second most common reason provided by the total sample for exercising is to build muscles. The fact that as a group they chose building muscles as the second most important reason to exercise suggests the connection muscularity has with their self-perceived masculinity and the masculinity they want to present to others.

The power lifters have already attained the ideal masculine body as seen on the magazine covers. Thus, their answer to whether or not these body types are attainable is a resounding yes. However, they asserted that they were the exception to the rule. They believe that most men cannot achieve their degree of physical muscularity. Their commitment to exercise to participate in specific sports that require great strength or power is a way of life. They feel it is an expression to others that they care about their health.

For the remainder of the men, age was the factor that distinguished their views of attaining the idealized body. The younger men, the straight college men and the straight

athletes, believe that not only are the images not attainable but men should not want to look like that. They do not see these men who exercise excessively to achieve ideal bodies as masculine or someone to take seriously. They believe the only reason a person would attempt to look like the images on the covers of the magazines presented to them is to win female companionship. However, the athletes indicate they have respect for men who look like the ideal and assert it helps others identify their masculinity if they do look like the ideal.

The straight working men and the gay working/college men believe the images on the magazine are attainable. Both groups have a sense of the work it takes a man to build a muscular body like the ones on the magazine covers. Notably, however, the gay working/college men indicated they were aware that the magazines lacked information to achieve a body like the ones on the covers. While the straight working men stated that magazine images remind them that they need to go to the gym, the gay working/college men believe that exercise brings about more self-confidence because one is actively doing something to maintain the body. However, some in this group believe that too much exercise is equivalent to being vain. In addition, the gay working/college men think men of a certain age should not try to achieve this type of body. Rather, they should focus on other aspects of manhood such as his personality and interests.

Overall, most of the men agree that exercise signals the level of commitment a man has to being masculine. Each group has a sense of what exercise means to achieving or maintaining a body that are seen on the magazine covers they reviewed. Either through the questionnaire or in the focus group sessions, the men who do not as much as

they believe they should state they are self-conscious about not being as masculine as others. They justify to their peers why they are not able to exercise as much as they perceive they should in order to negotiate their masculinity or lack of masculinity within the social structure of the masculine hierarchy.

The consensus for the groups is that the hyper-masculine male portrayed in the movies is the best representation of what they believe is the image of USAmerican masculinity. Actors such as Vin Diesel, Matt Damon and Brad Pitt are the examples of men they feel present the idealize form of masculinity in the media. While the majority of the sample do not believe they are more or less masculine than the images they see in the media, they do believe that exercise is an indicator of how much a man takes care of and expresses his masculinity. Through the perspective of the men in this study, too much or too little exercise makes a man less masculine than others. Due to the fact that 85 percent of the men in this study do not exemplify the ideal masculine body, it is interesting to note how large a part exercise and the physical body play in how they define masculinity. However, they also attribute centrality to self-confidence as part of muscularity and how a person knows a man is masculine.

As Connell states, “Bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice. The same bodies, at the same time, are both” (2009, 67). Through the examination of the presentations of bodies on men’s magazine covers and the discussion of masculinity with 27 men who are members of the dominant social group in USAmerican society, this research has found the connection between the body as an object and an agent in establishing the centrality of the body to idealized masculinity.

The men in this study assess their masculinity and each other's masculinity through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. Through their comprehending and actualizing the dominant meaning of USAmerican masculinity, men maintain the gender social order.

### Reflections on the Process

As a researcher, one brings one's own biases into the analysis. As a female researcher, one brings a gendered lens into the analysis. What I perceive as the meaning of the images on the covers has all of those cultural and gender biases. Introducing those images to men and asking them to tell me how they interpret those images allowed me to compare what I perceive to be the message of the media (specifically magazines) to what they perceive to be the message conveyed about masculinity. I was surprised to find how similar yet how differently heterosexual and homosexual men view masculinity.

Additionally, what I found in the process of this research is that the way I internalized and understand the meaning of masculinity is more similar to the way the gay men view USAmerican masculinity as well as to the way they perceive their personal masculinity. As the feminized other, our social understanding of masculinity comes from the perception of masculinity being represented as strength, power and emotional detachment. I was not taught femininity as a process of elimination. By being raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, I was socialized in a very specific manner of how southern femininity looks through school training and reinforcement of social manners. As a woman, I continue to be allowed and encouraged to show emotion while watching my male peers be discouraged to show emotion for fear of being seen as weak. This passing

on of gender understandings is very evident in watching my peers as parents and the gendered biases of masculinity and femininity they continue to pass down to their children.

As a female researcher, I was more frustrated than shocked with the difficulty I encountered in recruitment follow through. From past experienced, I knew focus group recruitment was difficult unto itself. With the number of men that initially signed up to participate, my optimism became the point of contention rather than the recruits' lack of participation. The reason for the non-participation by some was less surprising to me than my key informants. Some of the heterosexual men that chose not to participate indicated that they did not feel comfortable talking about masculinity. They felt it somehow made them appear homosexual because "real men don't talk about masculinity". In some cases, the rationality of not participating seemed out of place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In those instances, it was communicated to me that it was specifically because I was comparing straight and gay men that the straight men feared they would be seen as gay by their friends. In contrast, the homosexual men were more eager to talk about this topic because they expressed enthusiasm for their opinions being taken seriously. In the end, there were quite a few men that simply did not show up. Regardless of their reasons to participate or not participate, I was not surprised that the men I spoke to during recruitment were taken aback by the topic and did not think I was serious because as far as they were aware the attention by research communities and the media to bodies and gender has been heavily focused on femininity.

Since there is such a pronounced focus on women's bodies in the media, it is sometimes hard for me not to feel the pressure to compare my body to those that are presented in the media. While I suspected that there has become a more palpable pressure for men, it wasn't until I spoke to them that this pressure became real. I was surprised how passionate a few of the men got when discussing the pressure they feel to emulate this idealized body type. Two of the men seemed angry, as if in some way they are victims of pressure from women to look like the images on the magazines or in the movies.

As a result of this research, I believe there is much to be gained from combining content/visual analysis with querying actual men about topics that relate to masculinity. Content analysis examines historical documents that cannot be altered. They are what they are. Visual analysis goes deeper into a layer beneath content analysis and sees what the images say to the viewer collectively. With visual analysis, one has the option of taking the perspective of the receiver, the perspective of the producer, or you can combine the perspective of both the producer and the receiver. I took the position of receiver. Questionnaires give you the perspective of an individual without direct influence of others. Focus groups introduce the dynamic of social interaction and social influence. Through the combination of these four methodologies, I was able to assess my perception of the images and masculinity with the men's individual perceptions masculinity through the questionnaire and then assess how these men's individual perceptions may change when they interact in a group of men similar to themselves. Those individual perceptions that were influenced by group think, which was revealed

during analysis, such as men marking themselves as less masculine than others on the questionnaire and then claiming to be as masculine as others in the focus group, were not surprising to find. Social perception and reconciling a sense of acceptance play a part in our social need to belong to a group.

Overall, the process was as great a personal learning experience as it was an exercise in sociological inquiry. My gendered outsider status was more apparent in the heterosexual focus groups than the homosexual focus group. An instance when this was keenly apparent was when one heterosexual man continued to ask me throughout the focus group session what my definition of masculinity was. I believe he did this in part because he wanted to give me a correct answer or tailor his answers to what I wanted to hear. My refusal to answer his question or provide guidance on my perception of masculinity minimized the possibility of him or any other participant of being explicitly influenced by a female perspective.

### Implications for Future Research

The investigation of the meaning of masculinity through the eyes of the white men in this study has been the driving force of this research. The intent of this research has been to broaden the understanding of masculinity and the consumption of masculinity by men in USAmerican society. This research separates itself from past research with the use of a multi-method approach and the examination of masculinity through the viewpoint of two different perspectives: heterosexual men and homosexual men. In



doing so, it sheds light on the understanding of masculinity and self-actualization of masculinity by men.

Topics of masculinity and implications from magazines are not new areas of research. There are numerous studies that have come before this one that deal with masculinity as it relates to hegemony, violence, body perception, sports and many other topics. There have been studies that look at specific magazines, such as *Men's Health* and *Sports Illustrated*, to analyze the messages of masculinity that are represented in them. This study focuses on the consumption of images in media to better conceptualize the understanding men have about masculinity by having men examine those images. What this research reveals is the assumption of a culture-free, that is, natural representation of whiteness as the USAmerican ideal in magazines. Future research should examine these images from the perspective of production and inquire about the producers of the magazine images and analyze what they perceive as the message they are sending out to be consumed.

One of the ways this study contributes to shifting the discussion of masculinity is through the use of focus groups. By opening up the discussion of masculinity to groups of men rather than individual interviews, the discussion of perceptions, meanings and understandings is enriched. The findings of this research pull the discussion away from a dualistic view of male-female relationships by shedding light on the differences and similarities of the understanding of masculinity from same gendered persons. Both heterosexual and homosexual men in this study view their masculinity and others' masculinity from a social perspective that is dominated by the patriarchal ideology found

in USAmerican society. The language they use to describe masculinity is centered on traditional masculinities. Even when they internalize masculinity differently for themselves, they share the same idealized example of how the masculine human form should look.

Another discussion this research helps to shift is the feminization of issues of the body. This study supports Jacobi and Cash's 1994 notion that society provides idealized bodies that people believe others find desirable. The issue of social pressure on men to attain an idealized body type has been largely ignored outside of sports. This social issue has been feminized and is well documented for women and girls by the medical community and social science researchers. There has been some research that examines the concept of the hegemonic ideal body with adolescent boys and a handful of studies focus on athletes in this regard. However, there remained a gap in research analyzing this concept with the general population of adult males. While not the intent of this research, the uncovering of evidence of social pressure for men to achieve the representation of the ideal masculine body is important, and there is great potential for this issue to be expanded with future research.

Additionally, this idealized body that is central to masculinity as indicated by the men in this study was largely a reflection of their own profiles. The exemplars that they selected as the best representation of masculinity were other relatively young and privileged, white, able-bodied men. Future research should focus on inquiry into masculinity that includes men with physical disabilities, men of other races/ethnicities, ages and socioeconomic classes and other indices that differentiate them from the

dominant group this study's sample represents. Masculinity is, after all, a fluid concept changing from one generation to the next and varies across cultures as well (Connell, 2005). It behooves the field of men's and masculinity studies to explore the different dimensions that can impact social understanding of what masculinity means to men.

In closing, I'd like to note how the debates about masculinity that are centered around the male body as a means to rationalize violence and aggression or assert biologically determined gender roles do not transcend the actual subjects of our research. Rather, masculinity is a learned social ideology that is internalized and reified differently depending on social location and cultural influences. We will be better ethnographers if we take into consideration the complex perspectives of the men we study in the context of the myriad social realities in which they practice masculinity. Our theoretical insights into masculinity will be enriched thereby.

## APPENDIX A

### MAGAZINES DIRECTED TOWARD HETEROSEXUAL MALES

**Table 15**  
**List of Men's Magazines Directed Toward Heterosexual Males<sup>1</sup>**

Publication Title	First Year of Publication
American Curves	2002
American Curves Special	2006
Another Man	2005
Antenna	2007
Arena	1986
As Is Magazine	2006
Best Life	2004
Black Men	1991
Black Men Special	2005
Black Men SSX	2006
Chronos	2003
Cigar Aficionado	1994
Cigar Magazine	2005
Cincinnati Gentlemen	2005
Complex	2002
Complex Special	2002
Details for Men	2000
Esquire	1933
Esquire (UK)	1953
Esquire Special	2004
Exercise & Health	2005
Fashion Inc	2006
FHM (French)	1999
FHM (UK)	1994
FHM	2000

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Borders Group Inc. Borders bookstore in Sterling, VA and The Standard Periodical Directory thirtieth Edition 2007.

**Table 15. (continued)**

Publication Title	First Year of Publication
FHM Collections (UK)	1998
Fitness RX for Men	2003
Front	1998
Geek Monthly	2006
Giant	2004
GQ	1957
GQ (German)	1997
GQ (UK)	1989
GQ (Spain)	2006
GQ Style	2005
H Para Hombres	2007
Hooters	1989
HR: Watches	1998
In Sync	2003
International Wristwatch	1989
Jewels Fashion & Watches	1993
King	2001
Liquid	2006
Loaded	1994
L'uomo Vogue	2005
Maxim	1996
Maximum Fitness	2005
Men's Fitness	1996
Men's Health (UK)	2002
Men's Health	1999
Men's Health Special (UK)	2002
Men's Journal	1992
Men's Style	2007
Men's Vogue	2005
Numéro Homme	2001
Nylon Guys	2003
L'Officiel Hommes	2005
Plaza Watch	1993
Revolution	2000
Robb Report	1975
Se7en	2004
Show	2007
Show Calendar	2007
Smoke	1995

**Table 15. (continued)**

Publication Title	First Year of Publication
Smooth	2001
Smooth Girl	2004
Sneaker Freaker	2003
Soak	2005
Sole Collector	2003
Stuff (UK)	1998
Swiss Watchmaking Year	2001
T3 (UK)	1996
Uptown	1991
V Man	2003
Vogue Hommes	1985
Watch Collector	2007

## APPENDIX B

### MAGAZINES DIRECTED TOWARD HOMOSEXUAL MALES

**Table 16**  
**List of Men's Magazines Directed Toward Homosexual Males <sup>2</sup>**

Publication Title	First Year of Publication
Advocate	1967
Arise	2002
Attitude	1994
AXM	1999
Bears Life	2005
Curve	1991
DNA	2000
Envy Man	2006
Gay & Lesbian Review	1994
Gay Times	1984
Gaydar	2005
Genre	1991
Instinct	1997
Out	1973
Outlook Arizona	2005
Passport	2001
Preferences Magazine	2004
Pride	1998
reFRESH	2006
Tetu Le Magazine	1995
Tetu Voyage	2007
XY Magazine	1996
XY 10th Anniversary Special	2006
XY Foto	1998

---

<sup>2</sup> Source: Borders Group Inc. Borders Bookstore in Sterling, VA and The Standard Periodical Directory thirtieth Edition 2007.

## APPENDIX C

### CONTENT ANALYSIS FORM

Name of magazine:	Month and Year of publication:
Count of words on cover:	Human figure(s): Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Number of human figures:	If human, gender of image: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/>
Is the figure: Completely Clothed  Partially clothed  Completely unclothed	Part of body shown:  Full body Head shot Head to waist Head to knees Head to mid-thigh Head to ankle Heat to mid-crotch Head to mid-shoulder Head to mid-chest Head to shoulder  Other _____
Body shows: Defined muscles on unclothed body part  Defined muscles under clothes on body part  Absence of muscles on unclothed body part  Absence of muscles under clothes on body part	



Words on cover that are the largest font	Words on cover that are 2 <sup>nd</sup> largest font
General message on cover by collective words	Race of human figure(s) White African American or Black Hispanic Asian American Indian or Alaska Native Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Some other race
Audience magazine is directed for: Heterosexual Homosexual Any male	Picture image description:
Visual observations	

## APPENDIX D

### STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Informed Consent Agreement**

##### **Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sally Mohamed from American University. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways men communicate their personal masculinity to other people, how magazine covers influence masculinity definitions, and to gather information regarding how men know how much masculinity another man possesses. This study will contribute to the student's completion of her doctoral dissertation.

##### **Research Procedures**

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of a survey to individual participants and a focus group discussion that will be administered in Battelle Tompkins Sociology lounge. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to how you define masculinity, how the media influences that definition and how other people influence that definition. Your participation in the focus group will be audio recorded.

##### **Time Required**

Participation in this study will require 2 hours of your time.

##### **Risks**

**The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study.**

##### **Benefits**

Potential benefits from participation in this study is aiding in the expansion of the area of men's studies in the field of Sociology and ensuring that men are included in future research in the area of body image that has been previously reserved for women. This research is cutting edge and ground breaking for the area of men's studies in Sociology. There are no direct benefits to the participant.

### **Confidentiality**

The results of this research will be presented at a dissertation defense. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers including audio tapes will be destroyed.

### **Participation & Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any individual question without consequences.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Sally Mohamed  
Sociology Department  
American University  
sm1602a@student.american.edu

Dr. Gloria Young  
Sociology Department  
American University  
Telephone: (202)885-2254  
gyoung@american.edu

### **Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject**

Dr. David Haaga  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
American University  
(202)885-1718  
dhaaga@american.edu

Matt Zembrzuski  
IRB Coordinator  
American University  
(202)885-3447  
irb@american.edu

### **Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ I give consent to be audio taped in the focus group \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS**

For identification purposes, please select a fictional character from a book, magazine, comic, film or television show and place it on this survey. This will be your name during the duration of the survey questionnaire and focus group.

Answer all the questions by filling in the bubble to the left of your answer.

You may be given instructions to skip over questions in this survey. When this happens, you will see a note that tells you what question to answer next:

- ☐ Yes → **SKIP TO QUESTION 2**  
☐ No

All information that could enable someone to identify you will be kept completely confidential. Your participation is voluntary. Neither Sally Mohamed nor American University will ever share your personal information with anyone.

You may notice a number on the cover of this survey. This number is only used to keep track of the surveys.

If you would like more information about this research, please contact Sally Mohamed at 571-434-6234 or the American University Sociology department at (202) 885-2254.

### Survey Questionnaire

Questions about the media: The following questions will ask your opinion about the media you interact with in your daily life.

1. On average, how many hours do you use the internet in a week for non-work related use?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-3 hours
- ☐ 4-6 hours
- ☐ 7-9 hours
- ☐ 10 or more hours
- ☐ None, I do not use the internet

2. On average, how many hours of television do you watch in a week?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-3 hours
- ☐ 4-6 hours
- ☐ 7-9 hours
- ☐ 10 or more hours
- ☐ None, I do not watch television

3. On average, how many movies or films do you watch in month?

- ☐ 1-3 movies or films
- ☐ 4-6 movies or films
- ☐ 7-9 movies or films
- ☐ 10 or more movies or films
- ☐ None, I do not watch movies or film

4. Name your favorite recent movie and/or current television show (please print legibly)

---

5. Name your favorite male celebrity or actor (please print legibly)

---

6. What genre of movie/film/television entertainment do you like to watch the most? (pick only 1)

- ☐ Action
- ☐ Adventure
- ☐ Anime & Animation
- ☐ Children & Family
- ☐ Comedy
- ☐ Documentary
- ☐ Drama
- ☐ Faith & Spirituality
- ☐ Foreign
- ☐ Horror
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Music & Musical
- ☐ Pornography
- ☐ Reality
- ☐ Romance
- ☐ Science Fiction
- ☐ Thrillers
- ☐ Other [please list] \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ None of the above

7. On average, how many hours do you read books in a week?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-3 hours
- ☐ 4-6 hours
- ☐ 7-9 hours
- ☐ 10 or more hours
- ☐ None, I don't read books or comic books

8. On average, how many magazines do you read or look through in a month?

- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-6
- ☐ 7-9
- ☐ 10 or more
- ☐ None, I do not read or look through magazines → **SKIP TO QUESTION 13**

9. On average, how many hours do you spend reading or looking through magazines in a week?

- ☐ None, I do not read or look through magazines
- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-3 hours
- ☐ 4-6 hours
- ☐ 7-9 hours
- ☐ 10 or more hours

10. Where do you read or look through magazines most often?

- ☐ Online
- ☐ In paper form at a home
- ☐ In paper form at a store
- ☐ In paper form at a library
- ☐ In paper form at an office
- ☐ Other [please specify] \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ I do not read or look through magazines

11. As of today, do you have a magazine(s) subscription(s)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No → **SKIP TO QUESTION 13**

12. List up to 5 magazines that you have a subscription for?

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_



Questions about exercise: The following questions will ask your opinion about exercise and gym use.

13. On average, how many times a week do you exercise?

- ☐ 1-2 times a week
- ☐ 3-4 times a week
- ☐ 5-7 times a week
- ☐ More than 7 times a week
- ☐ I do not exercise → **SKIP TO QUESTION 17**

14. What is the reason you exercise? [Mark all that apply]

- ☐ To build up muscles
- ☐ To lose weight
- ☐ To gain weight
- ☐ I work at the gym
- ☐ Maintain my fitness level
- ☐ My doctor prescribed it
- ☐ To maintain my health
- ☐ To better my health
- ☐ Other [please specify] \_\_\_\_\_

15. I prefer to exercise at .....?

- ☐ A gym only
- ☐ Home only
- ☐ Both a gym and at home
- ☐ Other [please specify] \_\_\_\_\_

16. On average, how many times in 1 day do you exercise?

- ☐ 1 time a day
- ☐ 2 times a day
- ☐ 3 times a day
- ☐ 4 times a day
- ☐ 5 times a day
- ☐ 6 times a day
- ☐ 7 times a day
- ☐ More than 7 times a day
- ☐ Never, I do not exercise → **SKIP TO QUESTION 17**

Questions about masculinity: The following questions will ask you about your opinion about masculinity in the United States.

17. List five words that you think describe what it means to be masculine in the United States? (please print legibly)

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_

18. Thinking about your answers in Question 17, do you think masculinity is represented, by the words you selected, on magazine cover images?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. Thinking about your answers in Question 17, do you think masculinity is represented, by the words you selected, in television images?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

20. Thinking about your answers in Question 17 and your favorite film genre from Question 6, do you think masculinity is represented, by the words you selected, in movie or film images?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

21. List in order, from 1 to 3, the 3 most important sources from which you learned the most about what it means to be masculine? (1 is the most important source)

- \_\_\_\_ Father
- \_\_\_\_ Mother
- \_\_\_\_ Brother(s)
- \_\_\_\_ Sister(s)
- \_\_\_\_ Male friend(s)
- \_\_\_\_ Female friend(s)
- \_\_\_\_ Male Teacher(s)
- \_\_\_\_ Female Teacher(s)
- \_\_\_\_ Television
- \_\_\_\_ Movies
- \_\_\_\_ Magazines
- \_\_\_\_ Books
- \_\_\_\_ Music
- \_\_\_\_ Other [please specify] \_\_\_\_\_

22. List five words that your family or friends would use to describe your masculine trait(s) (please print legibly)

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) \_\_\_\_\_

23. Compared to your male friends, do you think you are .....?

- ☐ More masculine than they are
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine as they are
- ☐ Less masculine than they are

24. Do you think that men, in general, who exercise are .....?

- ☐ More masculine than those that do not exercise
- ☐ Less masculine than those that do not exercise
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine than those that do not exercise

25. Compared to men that **do not** exercise, do you think **you** are .....?

- ☐ More masculine than they are
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine as they are
- ☐ Less masculine than they are

26. Compared to men that **do** exercise, do you think **you** are .....?

- ☐ More masculine than they are
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine as they are
- ☐ Less masculine than they are

27. Do you think masculinity is shown through .....? (Pick one)

- ☐ Being muscular
- ☐ Having six-pack abs
- ☐ Having certain personality characteristics
- ☐ Both being muscular and having six-pack abs
- ☐ Both being muscular and having certain personality characteristics
- ☐ Both having six-pack abs & having certain personality characteristics
- ☐ Being muscular, having six pack abs, and certain personality characteristics
- ☐ None of the above

28. In general, do you think you are more or less masculine than the images on magazine covers that you read the most?

- ☐ More masculine
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine
- ☐ Less masculine

29. In general, do you think you are more or less masculine than the images in television shows you watch the most?

- ☐ More masculine
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine
- ☐ Less masculine

30. In general, do you think you are more or less masculine than the images in movies or films that you watch the most?

- ☐ More masculine
- ☐ Neither more nor less masculine
- ☐ Less masculine

Demographic Questions: The following questions will ask you about your current demographics. This will help ensure your answers are compiled with others like yourself.

31. What is your age?

- ☐ 18 – 20 years old
- ☐ 21 – 23 years old
- ☐ 24 -26 years old
- ☐ 27 – 29 years old
- ☐ 30 – 32 years old
- ☐ 33 - 35 years old
- ☐ 36 years old or older

32. Are you .....

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Non-Hispanic or Latino

33. What is your race?

- ☐ White
- ☐ African American or Black
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Some Other Race

34. Do you work.....?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ I do not work

35. Are you a student .....?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ I am not a student

36. I consider myself .....?

- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

**You've reached the end of the survey. Thank you for your participation.**

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Engagement Questions

1. What five words best describe masculinity?
2. How do you define masculinity?
3. What are the 3 most important sources from which you learned the most about what it means to be masculine?

Exploratory Questions

4. How did you learn what masculinity was growing up?
5. Has the media play a role in that definition of masculinity? If so, which one? Explain.
6. What impact do media play in your perception of how you express your own masculinity?
7. How much do magazines play a part in your understanding of masculinity?
8. Are the images on the magazines attainable?
9. How much do you perceive masculinity is expressed through having muscles?
10. Do the images on the magazines covers encourage you to work out?

11. Do you feel pressure to look like the pictures in the magazines?
12. How does working out allow you to express your masculinity?
13. How do the images on magazine covers influence how you feel about yourself physically?
14. How do you know if your image is masculine?

Exit Question

15. Is there anything else that you would like to say about masculinity that we did not cover here today?



## APPENDIX F

### EXAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS MAGAZINE COVERS



Published with permission



Published with permission

July 22, 2011  
 Sally Mohamed  
 45529 Grand Central Sq  
 Sterling, VA 20166

Dear Mr. Stephen F. Macias:

I am writing to request permission to reprint the following material from your publication of *Out Magazine*:

Date of Publication: May 1999  
 Pages as they appear in your publication: Cover page

Date of Publication: May 2004  
 Pages as they appear in your publication: Cover page

This material is to appear as originally published (any changes or deletions are noted on the reverse side of this letter) in my dissertation which I am writing at American University and which will be published by University Microfilms, Incorporated.

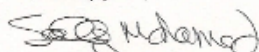
Author: Sally Mohamed  
 Title: Hegemonic Masculinity: A study of white men and men's magazine covers.  
 Proposed date of publication: August 5, 2011

If you are the copyright holder, may I have your permission to reprint the above material in the dissertation **and UMI be given permission to sell copies of the dissertation containing the indicated material?** If you do not indicate otherwise, we will use the usual scholarly form of acknowledgement, including publisher, author, title, etc.

If you are not the copyright holder, or if additional permission is needed for world rights from another source, please so indicate.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please sign the form on this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience. A duplicate copy of this letter and form is enclosed for your files.

Sincerely yours,

  
 Sally Mohamed

The above request is hereby approved on the conditions specified below, and on the understanding that full credit will be given to the source.

Date: 7/26/11 Approved by: 

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, Susan M. 2003. "Stylish Hard Bodies: Branded Masculinity in Men's Health Magazine." *Sociological Perspectives* 46(4):535-554.
- Anderson, E. 2002. "Openly Gay Athletes: Contesting Hegemonic Masculinity in a Homophobic Environment." *Gender and Society* 16(6):860-877.
- Baker, C. N. 2005. "Images of Women's Sexuality in Advertisements: a Content Analysis of Black- and White-oriented Women's and Men's Magazines." *Sex Roles* 52(1-2):13-27.
- Ball, Michael S., and Gregory W. H. Smith. 1992. *Analyzing Visual Data*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Banks, Marcus. 2001. *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Beasley, Chris. 2005. *Gender & Sexuality: Critical Theories, Critical Thinkers*. London: Sage Publications.
- Becker, Howard. S. 1979. "Preface." Pp. 7-8 in *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. edited by Jon Wagner. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- , 1981. *Exploring Society Photographically*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , 1982. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 1986. *Doing Things Together*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- , 2002. "Visual Evidence: a Seventh Man, the Specified Generalization, and the Work of the Reader." *Visual Studies* 17(1):3-11.
- Berg, B. L. 1995. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Betrock, Alan. 1993. *Pin-up Mania: The Golden Age of Men's Magazines 1950-1967*. Brooklyn, New York: Shake Books.

- Bird, S. R. 1996. "Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosexuality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Gender and Society* 10(2):120-132.
- Borders, Borders Group Inc, 21031 Triple Seven Road, Suite 100, Sterling VA 20165, File: Corporate Magazine List 2008.
- Botta, Renee A. 2003. "For Your Health? The Relationship Between Magazine Reading and Adolescents' Body Image and Eating Disturbances." *Sex Roles* 48(9-10):389-399.
- Boyle, Ellexis. 2010. "Marketing Muscular Masculinity in Arnold: the education of a bodybuilder." *Journal of Gender Studies* 19(2):153-166.
- Brannon, Daniel. 1976. "The Male Sex Role: Our Culture's Blueprint of Manhood and What It's Done for Us Lately." Pp 1-14 in *The Forty-nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role*, edited by D. David and R. Brannon. New York: Random House.
- Breazeale, Kenon. 1994. "In Spite of Women: "Esquire" Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer." *Signs* 20(1):1-22.
- Brod, Harry. 1987. *The Making of Masculinities; the New Men's Studies*. Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin.
- Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. 1985. "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society* 14(5):551-604.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. 2011. Glossary of Terms. Retrieved July 27, 2011 (<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/glossary/index.html>)
- Chafetz, Janet Saltzman. 1974. *Masculine/Feminine or Human? An Overview of the Sociology of Sex Roles*. Itasca, IL: FE Peacock Publishers.
- Chapin, E. 1994. *Sociology and Visual Representations*. London: Routledge.
- Cheatwood, Derral and Clarice Stasz. 1979. "Visual sociology." Pp. 261-269 in *Images of Information Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. edited by Jon Wagner. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cheng, Cliff. 1999. Marginalized Masculinities and Hegemonic Masculinity: An Introduction. *Journal of Men's Studies* 7(3):295-310.
- Clarkson, Jay. 2006. "'Everyday Joe' Versus 'Pissy, Bitchy Queens': Gay Masculinity on StraightActing.com." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 14(2):191-207.

- Collier, John. 1979. "Evaluating Visual Data." Pp. 161-169 in *Images of Information Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. edited by Jon Wagner. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Collier, John Jr. and Malcolm Collier. 1986. *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Connell, R.W. 1992. "A Very Straight Gay: Masculinity, Homosexual Experience, and the Dynamics of Gender." *American Sociological Review* 57(6):735-751.
- , 1993. "The Big Picture: Masculinities in Recent World History." *Theory and Society* 22(5):597-623.
- , 1998. "Masculinities and Globalization." *Men and Masculinities*, 1(3): 3-23.
- , 2000. *The Men and the Boys*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- , 2005. *Masculinities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- , 2009. *Gender* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Connell, R.W. and J. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19(6):829-859.
- Creswell, John W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Craig, Steve. 1992. *Men, Masculinity and the Media*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crawshaw, Paul. 2007. "Governing the Healthy Male Citizen: Men, Masculinity and Popular Health in Men's Health Magazine." *Social Science and Medicine* 65(8):1606-1618.
- Davis, Lauren R. 1997. *The Swimsuit Issue and Sport: Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports Illustrated*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Demetriou, Demetrakis Z. 2001. "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique." *Theory and Society* 30(3):337-361.
- Denzin, Norman K. 1978. *The Research Act: a Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.



- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Donaldson, M. 1993. "What is Hegemonic Masculinity?" *Theory and Society* 22(5):643-657.
- Donovan, Brian. 1998. "Political Consequences of Private Authority: Promise Keepers and the Transformation of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Theory and Society* 27(6):817-843.
- Dowsett, Gary. 2005. "Differences: REI and Gay Masculinities." Pp. in *Gender & Sexuality: critical theories, critical thinkers*. edited by Chris Beasley. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Edwards, Tim. 1990. "Beyond Sex and Gender: Masculinity, Homosexuality and Social Theory." Pp. 110-123 in *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory*. edited by Jeff Hearn and David Morgan. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Federal Trade commission. 2002.
- Forbes, Gordon B. 2001. Body Dissatisfaction in Women and Men: The Role of Gender-Typing and Self-Esteem. *Sex Roles* 44(7-8):461-484.
- Fouts, Gregory and Kimberly Vaughan. 2002. Television Situation Comedies: Male Weight, Negative References and Audience Reactions. *Sex Roles* 46(11-12):439-442.
- Goffman, E. 1956. *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- , 1979. *Gender advertisements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gold, S. J. 1997. "Introduction." *Qualitative Sociology* 20(1):3-6.
- Griswold, Wendy. 2004. *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Halliwell, Emma. 2003. "A Qualitative Investigation of Women's and Men's Body Image Concerns and Their Attitudes Towards Aging." *Sex Roles* 49(11-12):675-684.
- Hatoum, Ida J. 2004. "Mags and Abs: Media Consumption and Bodily Concerns in Men." *Sex Roles* 51(7-8):397-407.

- Hesse-Biber, S. 1996. *Am I thin enough?* New York: Oxford Press.
- Hearn, Jeff. 1998. "The Swimsuit Issue and Sport: Hegemonic Masculinity in 'Sports Illustrated' review." *The American Journal of Sociology* 103(6):1749-1751.
- Imms, Wesley D. 2000. "Multiple Masculinities and the Schooling of Boys." *Canadian Journal of Education* 25(2):52-165.
- Jackson, Peter, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks. 2001. *Making sense of men's magazines*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jackson, P. 1991. "The Cultural Politics of Masculinity: Towards a Social Geography." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series* 16(2):199-213.
- Jacobi, Lora and Thomas Cash. 1994. "In Pursuit of the Perfect Appearance: Discrepancies Among Self-Ideal Percepts of Multiple Physical Attributes." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 24(5):379-396.
- Kendall, Lori. 2000. "'Oh No! I'm a Nerd!': Hegemonic Masculinity on an Online Forum." *Gender and Society* 14(2):256-274.
- Kessler, Suzanne J. 1990. The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16(1):3-26.
- Kimmel, Michael S. 1987. *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- , 1990. "After Fifteen Years: The Impact of the Sociology of Masculinity on the Masculinity of Sociology." Pp. 93-109 in *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory*. edited by Jeff Hearn and David Morgan. London: Unwin Hyman.
- , 2004. *The Gendered Society* (second edition). New York: Oxford University Press.
- , 2006. *Manhood in America a cultural history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kimmel, Michael and Aronson. 2004. *Men and Masculinities a Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia Volume II: K-Z*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO.
- Kimmel, Michael and Michael Messner. 2000. *Men's Lives*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Levine, Marin P. 1998. *Gay Macho the Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*. New York: New York University Press.



- Lorber, Judith. 1998. "Men's Gender Politics." *Gender and Society* 12(4):469-472.
- Markey, Charlotte N. 2005. "Relations Between Body Image and Dieting Behaviors: An Examination of Gender Differences." *Sex Roles* 53(7-8):519-530.
- Marshall, Gordon. 1994. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,
- Martin, P. Y. 1998. "Why Can't a Man be More Like a Woman? Reflections on Connell's Masculinities." *Gender and Society* 12(4):472-474.
- Marvasti, Amir B. 2004. *Qualitative Research in Sociology*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- McCabe, Marita P. and Lina A. Ricciardelli. 2001. "Parent, Peer and Media Influences on Body Image and Strategies to Both Increase and Decrease Body Size Among Adolescent Boys and Girls." *Adolescence* 36(142):225-240.
- , 2003. "Sociocultural Influences on Body Image and Body Changes Among Adolescent Boys and Girls." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 143(1):5-26.
- McGuffey, C. Shawn and B. Lindsay Rich. 1999. "Playing in the Gender Transgression Zone: Race, Class, and Hegemonic Masculinity in Middle Childhood." *Gender and Society* 13(5):608-627.
- Melcher, Janet and Gerald J. Bostwick, Jr. 1998. "The Obese Client: Myths, Facts, Assessment, and Intervention." *Health and Social Work* 23(3):195-202.
- Messner, Michael A. 1990. "When Bodies Are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport." *International Review for Sociology of Sport* 25(3):203-220.
- , 2006. "'Changing Men' and Feminist Politics in the United States." *Theory and Society* 22(5):723-737.
- Miller, Toby. 1998. "Commodifying the Male Body, Problematizing Hegemonic Masculinity?" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 22(4):431-447.
- Morrison, Todd G. 2004. "Body-image Evaluation and Body-image Investment Among Adolescents: A Test of Sociocultural and Social Comparison Theories". *Adolescence*, 39(155):371-392.

- Perry, Pamela. 2001. "White Means Never Having to Say You're Ethnic: White Youth and the Construction of "Cultureless" Identities." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30(1):56-91.
- Pink, Sara. 2001. *Doing Visual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
- Prosser, J. 1996. "What Constitutes an Image Based Qualitative Methodology?." *Visual Sociology* 11(2):25-34.
- , 1998. *Image-Based Research: A Sourcebook For Qualitative Researchers*. London: Falmer Press.
- Renold, Emma. 2001. "Learning the 'Hard' Way: Boys, Hegemonic Masculinity and the Negotiation of Leaner Identities in the Primary School." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 22(3):369-385.
- Rogoff, Irit and David van Leer. 1993. "Afterthoughts...A Dossier on Masculinities." *Theory and Society* 22(5):739-762.
- Ruby, Jay. 1996. "Visual Anthropology". Pp. 1345-1351 in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* Volume 4. edited by David Levinson and Melvin Ember.
- Schilt, Kristen and Laurel Westbrook. 2009. Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: "Gender Normals," Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality. *Gender & Society* 23:440-463.
- Schleifer, David. 2006. "Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Female-to-Male Transgenderists Negotiating Sex, Gender, and Sexuality." *Sexualities* 9(1):57-75.
- Seidler, Victor J. 2007. "Masculinities, Bodies, and Emotional Life." *Men and Masculinities* 10(9):9-21.
- Silverstein, Brett, Lauren Perdue, Barbara Peterson, and Eileen Kelly. 1986. "The Role of the Mass Media on Promoting a Thin Standard of Bodily Attractiveness for Women." *Sex Roles* 14(9-10):519-532.
- Skelton, Christine. 1997. "Primary Boys and Hegemonic Masculinities." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 18(3):349-369.
- Smiler, Andrew P. 2004. "Thirty Years After the Discovery of Gender: Psychological Concepts and Measures of Masculinity." *Sex Roles* 50:15-26.
- Sobal, Jeffery and Donna Maurer. 1999. *Interpreting Weight: The Social Management of Fatness and Thinness*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- 1999. *Weighty Issues: Fatness and Thinness as Social Problems*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Stacey, Judith. 1993. "Toward Kinder, Gentler Uses for Testosterone." *Theory and Society* 22(5):711-721.
- Stasz, Clarice. 1979. "The Early History of Visual Sociology." Pp. 119-136 in *Images of Information Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. edited by Jon Wagner. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Stibbe, Arran. 2004. "Health and the Social Construction of Masculinity in Men's Health Magazine." *Men and Masculinities* 7(31):31-51.
- Stinson, Kandi M. 2001. *Women and Dieting Culture: Inside a Commercial Weight Loss Group*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- The Association of Magazine Media. 2009. *Average Single Copy Circulation for Top 100 ABC Magazines*. Retrieved November 8, 2010 ([http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER\\_MARKETING/CIRC\\_TRENDS/2009ABCsinglecopyrank.aspx](http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER_MARKETING/CIRC_TRENDS/2009ABCsinglecopyrank.aspx)).
- 2009. *Average Total Paid & Verified Circulation for Top 100 ABC Magazines*. Retrieved November 8, 2010 ([http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER\\_MARKETING/CIRC\\_TRENDS/2009-sub-circ-top-100-abc.aspx](http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER_MARKETING/CIRC_TRENDS/2009-sub-circ-top-100-abc.aspx)).
- The Standard Periodical Directory*. 2007. New York: Oxbridge Communications.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2009. *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook (2009 Edition)*. Retrieved November 21, 2010 (<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/cps/wlf-intro-2009.htm>).
- van Leeuwen, Theo and Carey Jewitt. 2001. *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.
- Vigorito, Anthony J. and Timothy J. Curry. 1998. "Marketing Masculinity: Gender Identity and Popular Magazines." *Sex Roles*. 39(1/2):135-152.
- Wagner, Jon. 1979. "Avoiding error." Pp. 147-159 in *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. edited by Jon Wagner. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

- , 1979. "Photography and Social Science Process." Pp. 283-295 in *Images of Information Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. edited by Jon Wagner. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wang, Athena. 2000. "Asian and White Boys' Competing Discourses about Masculinity: Implications for Secondary Education." *Canadian Journal of Education* 25(2):113-125.
- Weber, Brenda. 2006. "What Makes the Man? Television Makeovers, Made-Over Masculinity, and Male Body Image." *International Journal of Men's Health* 5(3):287-306.
- West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. Doing Gender. *Gender & Society* 1(2):125-149.
- Wetherell, Margaret and Nigel Edley. 1999. "Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices." *Feminism and Psychology* 9(3):335-357.
- Whitehead, Steven. 1999. "Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited." *Gender, Work and Organizations* 6(1): 58-62.
- Williamson, J. 1978. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London: Marion Boyours.
- Wise, Sheila J. 2001. "Redefining Black Masculinity and Manhood: Successful Black Gay Men Speak Out." *Journal of African American Studies* 5(4):3-22.