

# The construction of masculinity in men's magazines



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Men are increasingly becoming the consumers of ideologies and products once confined to the female domain, such as grooming products and fashion. In particular the increasing publication, and consumption, of magazines that target the male audience has been a strong media influence, such as GQ, Esquire, For Him Magazine (FHM), and, Loaded.

In the chapter 'consuming masculinities: Style, Content and Men's Magazines' in the book 'Men in the mirror', Tim Edwards' (1997) discusses the implications of men's magazines for the development of male masculinity. He notes that since the 1980's there has been an increase in magazines that specifically target men, whether this be directly through the inclusion of style-conscious articles, or more general targeting of regular features that may appeal to men, or finally through interest magazines, which do not specifically target men but are mainly concerned with male interests such as technology or cars.

During the text's discussion on the cause of the rise in men's magazines, and their influence on male masculinity, Edwards' acknowledges the rise in the 'new man' and the 'new lad' in which new forms of masculinities can be argued to be developing within society. However, ultimately, there is a single dominant masculinity that is presented and targeted by men's magazines.

Outline:

### **Time Edward's 'Consuming Masculinities: Style, Content and Men's Magazines'**

The increase in men's magazines in general is due to the social, economic, and political changes during the 1980's and 1990's.

Financial advancement of many men, in particular young middle class white males in the professional and primary sectors of employment.

A consequence of demographic changes now means that men now live alone or do not have children.

Political encouragements of individualism and increasing aspirations from the Thatcher and Major periods.

Influential position of women's and gay movements which challenge the notions of heterosexual masculinity.

The increasing social acceptance of men to be consumers of their own masculinity, e. g. the male body can be sold, imitated and copied.

The style and content of men's magazines appears ' varied and free-floating' but is in fact fixed.

Many of the magazines appeal to the affluent, professional, or managerial men in society.

Students also comprise a strong readership in men's magazines; however it is important to remember that it is students that will eventually form the next generation of professionals.

The majority of male magazines assume the heterosexuality of their readers.

The legitimisation of consumption as a socially acceptable male activity as a symbol of success.

Men's magazines promote a new form of masculinity which is pre-occupied with consumer-oriented attitudes and practises.

Masculinity can be constantly reconstructed through the consumption of identity building activities such as shopping or leisure activities.

The development of the 'New Lad' is a continuing development upon the notions of the 'New Man', in which the new lad embraces masculinity.

The new man is characterised as being caring and sharing, on the contrary, the new lad is characterised as being selfish, loutish and enjoys drinking, football and fucking.

Literature Review:

According to cultural perspectives, masculinity can be understood as providing members of society with a 'shared understanding of what it means to be a man: what one looks like, how one should behave' (Edley and Wetherell, 1996: 106). This is evident in studies which have focused on the analysis of men's magazines, and have found that they frequently present a constructed image of masculinity. As Edley and Wetherell suggest 'manliness, in other words, is a contested territory; it is an ideological battlefield' (1996: 106).

Edwards (1997), Boni (2002) and Edley and Wetherell (1996) all acknowledge that there is a 'crisis of masculinity' in which masculinity is being reconstructed and moving away from traditional ideas of men as main role as the breadwinner, and adopting a more consumer masculinity. In such, masculinity is argued to be consuming ideologies and products once

<https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-masculinity-in-mens-magazines/>

confined to the female domain, such as fashion and leisure activities such as shopping. To demonstrate further, the increasing notion of the 'metrosexual male' describes a masculinity which is concerned with looking good, and creating a good presentation of the self. Such a concept, previously would have been confined to the realm of women, and to some degree was seen as an expectation of women to look good for their husbands, this was particularly prominent in the Victorian ideology of gender. However, it is necessary to note that 'crisis' does not necessarily mean negative, however a re-negotiation of masculinity within society.

In the chapter by Edwards (1997), masculinity is seen as being continually reconstructed in association with the consumer culture in men's magazines. Similarly, Boni (2002) also acknowledges the same in his more recent study of men's magazines. However, Boni, unlike Edwards, acknowledges that men are not simply passive viewers of magazines, but in reality engage in the information presented. In a discussion of the interpretation of health and body representations of masculinity, Boni notes that men may adopt one of three strategies of responding to the presented masculinity. The first response is the 'reliance strategy' in which men rely on the representation of a healthy image for the standard on which to base their own life. Secondly, the 'reformation strategy' allows for the modification of the ideal masculinity in order to fit in with an individual's abilities. Finally, the 'rejection strategy' is adopted by individuals who oppose the masculinity presented. Thus this demonstrates that while men's magazines continually present and reconstruct masculinities, it is not a one way process, and in fact men

interacts with these representations to fit with their own perceptions of masculinity.

Furthermore, the continuing adaptations of masculinity has also generated a change in the male gaze. Previously men were deemed to look and women were to be looked at, however with the flourishing of men's magazines the male gaze has been restructured. Through men's magazines, men have been constructed as 'objects of desire to be bought and sold, or imitated and copied' (Edwards, 1997: 125; Boni, 2002). To illustrate further in a study of men's magazine Men's Health, Boni (2002) noted that images within the magazine were frequently young, lean, muscular male bodies. Thus demonstrating that the male body is presented in men's magazines as something to adopt or aspire to.

However, with the advent of the 'new lad' acknowledged by Edwards (1997), a shift towards a separation in masculine ideologies is evident. Edwards describes the 'new lad' as 'oddly still all too self-conscious and quick to consider the cut of his jeans or the Lacoste label on his T-shirt: in short, his is that most ghastly of all configurations, defensively working class which also means defensively masculine' who is interested in 'drinking, football and fucking, and in that order' (1997: 82). In addition Boni also notes the emergence of this concept of masculinity in the increasing range of men's magazines which publish topless women on their front pages, and the extensive range of soft-porn content within the magazines. What is further evident, is the separation of the new lad and the new man, and in which particular magazines target particular individuals. The new lad can be associated with a working class construction of masculinity, thus it can be

<https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-masculinity-in-mens-magazines/>

argued that in recent years there has been a development in a range of men's magazines to target different sections of society.

It is thus evident that masculinity cannot be considered as a singular entity; rather in the referral to men's magazines we should discuss masculinities.

While some men's magazines explicitly target and promote a single masculinity, it would be naive to consider this as the only form of masculinity within society. Edley and Wetherell (1996) note that the dominant ideology of masculinity has been enforced by the dominant class within society (i. e. the middle, upper class) through the cultural meanings reinforced through key institution, such as schools, churches, and the media. Thus the development of the new lad could be argued to be a successful attempt to fight against the dominant ideologies of masculinity presented by society.

Crosscutting Themes:

As has been demonstrated, the construction of masculinity within men's magazines heavily relies on the wider construction of masculinity within society. In particular the changes of the economic position of men during the post-fordism era construct men as moving away from the role of the breadwinner, and towards a more segregated role within society. Thus it is necessary to consider the wider implications of economic changes within society to understand the full impact on masculinity. However, it is important to note that it can be argued that these changes are perceived changes as men still predominantly occupy the higher sectors of employment and still continue to act as a breadwinner within the family, as may women's wages continue to be less than men's.

What's more, the wider constructions of masculinity within the media should be considered, especially in relation to the new construction of fatherhood which sees men as adopting a more caring and supportive role within the family. This therefore contradicts Edwards' argument that more men are interested in men's magazines as more are remaining childless, as recent media publicity, and other academic studies, have shown fathers wanting to adopt a more integrated role in the family.

To conclude, the construction of masculinity cannot be considered in a vacuum, and the wider impact of other forms of the media, and other constructions of masculinity within society must be acknowledged.

Additionally, masculinity does not exist separately for femininity, thus to fully understand the construction on masculinity, it is necessary to understand the construction of femininity. This is particularly important because as it has been demonstrated negotiations are made between the two ideologies about what is acceptable.