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"It Takes Less to Be a Man Nowadays": Exploring Persistence and Change in Masculinity Narratives Among College-Aged Men

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“It Takes Less to Be a Man Nowadays”:
Exploring Persistence and Change in Masculinity Narratives Among College-Aged Men

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, 2017

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

Over the last several decades, a growing field of scholarship unpacks the concept of masculinity and its implications for gender and social hierarchy. Of particular interest are the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated through the media and social discourse. The current study uses content analysis to highlight themes in the commodification of masculinity depicted in a series of Playboy Magazine's "What Sort of Man Reads Playboy?" ads throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Conducting focus groups, I then use responses to these historical images and a contemporary equivalent to explore the persistence and evolution of portrayals of masculine ideals and media-depicted masculinity. For example, although literature provides reasons to believe that there have been significant transformations regarding social depictions of men and masculinity, scholars have yet to fully examine these possibilities. Combining the content analysis of Playboy images of hegemonic masculinity with current perceptions from young adult males can provide a more complete understanding of cultural shifts and consistencies in how men understand and define what it means to be a man and the extent to which societal gender roles and expectations have evolved or diversified over time.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, homosocial desire, Playboy

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my biggest supporters: Mom and dad...I owe everything to you. Your love and support got me here.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Key Concepts in Masculinity Studies.....	2
The Current Study.....	10
Methods.....	10
Discussion/Conclusion.....	45
References.....	49

Introduction

What does it mean to be a man? Exploring cultural ideals and proscribed behaviors associated with masculinity is particularly important given current events. In October of 2017, the topic of sexual assault and harassment began to reach national attention when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted a suggestion that perhaps if women shared their stories, then people would understand the magnitude of the problem. This led to what we refer to now as the #MeToo movement, which has resulted in many high-profile male perpetrators being held publicly (and in some cases, criminally) accountable for their past and present behaviors of sexual assault and harassment towards female coworkers. Nationwide, people everywhere began speaking up about the toxic consequences of hegemonic masculinity, including male domination and power over women, the oppression of other subordinate masculinities, and the use of aggression and violence.

Calls for change received further support in January of 2019, when the American Psychological Association released guidelines for psychological practice with boys and men. The APA document provided ten guidelines with the purpose of helping psychologists deal with issues directly related to masculinity. Guidelines include topics on recognizing masculinity as a social construction; understanding power and privilege; understanding the relationships between boys and men; and methods to reducing violence and aggression. (APA Guidelines, 2019). The advent of these guidelines is an important step in recognizing how the socialization of young males within traditional conceptualizations of masculinity can be problematic.

While historically the behaviors and attitudes being discussed are not new, the tremendous public response, activism, criticism, and media coverage brought to these issues is distinctive and has enabled hegemonic masculinity to emerge as a contemporary social problem. This framing

has met with some resistance, consistent with what scholars describe as a masculinity “crisis” (Kimmel, 2006). During such times, masculinity is seen as being threatened, and people (men and women) feel the urge to “salvage, revitalize, and resurrect it” (Kimmel, 2006: 7).

Corporations and the media have been active in this debate as well. For example, most recently, Gillette, the razor company, released an advertisement that criticizing tolerance of negative aspects of masculinity (sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying, and violence). It depicted other men as rejecting these ideals, and directly intervening and preventing male violence and harassment, stating “We believe in the best a man can be.” Later, an advertisement by GNC, a nutritional supplement company countered this position, asking “What happened to the real men of American?” and encouraging men to [buy a testosterone-producing supplement Force Factor] in order to “Man up, America!”.

Aside from consumerism, one serious health consequence of hegemonic masculinity can be seen in the suicide rates nationwide over the past two decades. In 2017, the suicide rate of men were four times that of women (CDC, 2019). This suggest there is considerable need for research on the media and consistency and change in cultural definitions of masculinity. Indeed, while there is a good deal of public debate and speculation, there is considerably less empirical research upon which to draw conclusions regarding cultural paradigm shifts. Consequently, the extent to which the traditional the attitudes and behaviors perpetuated by hegemonic masculinity are still supported and shared amongst men, and the importance of media in these constructions, is unknown. My study aims to inform public and scholarly discussions in this regard.

Key Concepts in Masculinity Studies

My study explores how behaviors, attitudes, and values are culturally proscribed as gender-conforming and non-gender-conforming among men. Two main concepts in the

sociology of masculinity literature, hegemonic masculinity and homosocial desire, are especially relevant for the current research questions and analyses presented. In the following paragraphs, I provide a brief overview of each concept and describe some important works.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemony was first conceptualized in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, and is understood as practices that allow certain groups to hold power over other groups in society. Essentially, it is "importantly about the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination" (Donaldson, 1993:645). R.W. Connell later applied this concept to gender studies in the 1980s to analyze how a particular type of masculinity created tension between the ideal image of what it meant to be a man and the actual lived experiences of men. While critiquing this history of research on the male sex role, Connell opted for a model consisting of multiple masculinities and critiques of power relations that resulted in a systematic sociological theory of gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell talks about hegemonic masculinity as being based on men's actual practices and behaviors, not just on role expectations (as in sex role theory). Through Connell's theory also emerged her concept of multiple masculinities, meaning that aside from hegemonic masculinity there were subordinated masculinities and complicit masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Due to the normative nature of hegemonic masculinity, men who did not embody the heterosexual, white, macho identity were pushed to be the subordinate masculinity. Those who benefited from hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of other men and women without actually enacting these behaviors into their daily lives, were thought to be displaying a complicit masculinity. "It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (Connell &

Messerschmidt, 2005:832). In many ways, this is consistent with Goffman's (1963) description of the "one unblushing male in America":

"In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports...Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior" (Goffman, 1963:128).

David and Brannon's (1976) *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority* is an important work in the area of hegemonic masculinity. The authors describe the four main requirements or rules of masculinity: (1) No Sissy Stuff: the stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability; (2) The Big Wheel: success, status, and the need to be looked up to; (3) The Sturdy Oak: A manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance; and (4) Give 'Em Hell!: the aura of aggression, violence, and daring (David & Brannon, 1976:12).

Hegemonic masculinity explains how certain groups of men gain a dominant position of power, and they justify and perpetuate the relationships that continue their dominance" (Carrigan et al., 1985:592). Hegemonic masculinity then, is not available to all men, which creates a tension and a distance from what is collectively expected of men, and their actual lived experiences (Carrigan et al., 1985:592). If hegemonic masculinity is only attainable for a small number of men, why then are so many men complicit in sustaining this masculine ideal? The most significant reason is that the majority of men benefit from the subordination of women that hegemonic is centralized on (Carrigan et al., 1985:592). Hegemonic masculinity is based off a few central themes: persuasion of the population through media, heterosexuality and homophobia, and male competition for sexual validation from women (Donaldson, 1993).

Sharon Bird (1996) looked at homosocial (nonsexual personal) interactions between men to show how hegemonic masculinity is maintained. She studied this through in-depth interviews with men and also with field observations in coffee shops and delis where small groups of men would interact. She found that there exist three main themes within homosocial interactions: emotional detachment, competitiveness, and objectification of women. These components of men's homosocial interactions are what Bird says maintains and perpetuates hegemonic masculinity (Bird, 1996). In our study, we are essentially looking at some of the same things Bird looked at, regarding how men interact and talk about masculinity. However, the difference is that we will have men talking and responding to questions in focus groups. Although we want to hear their responses, the way they interact with each other and respond in the presence of other men is of particular interest to us.

The concept and consequences of masculinity, specifically hegemonic masculinity, are explored throughout the work of sociologist Michael Kimmel (1996; 2006; 2008; 2013). In his critique of masculine socialization and the ubiquity of gender roles, he notes

“[T]he quest for manhood—the effort to achieve, to demonstrate, to prove our masculinity—has been one of the formative and persistent experiences in men's lives. That we remain unaware of the centrality of gender in our lives only helps to perpetuate gender inequality” (Kimmel, 2006:3).

Kimmel characterizes “manhood” as being less about the drive to dominate others, but more about the fear of being dominated by others (Kimmel, 2006:4). His research also emphasizes the homosocial aspect to masculinity.

Homosocial Desire

One of the concepts that this project seeks to explore is that of homosocial desire. Homosocial desire can be explained as the behaviors of men that are rooted in the motivation to impress, and to gain the approval of other men. Because of this, men are constantly trying to

prove their manhood—driven by the perpetual fear that they will be perceived by other men as weak or untough (Kimmel, 2006; 2008; 2013). Another work that explores this concept closely is an article written by Scott Kiesling, where he looks at the role that homosocial desire plays in men's everyday lives. He conducts ethnographic work with a fraternity to analyze the way that these men talk to each other and negotiate friendship through cultural discourses of masculinity. Cultural discourses were originally defined by Michael Foucault (1972) as culturally shared ways of thinking, speaking, and doing. Specifically, cultural discourses of masculinity refer to society's general assumptions on how men act, talk, and feel (Kiesling, 2005:696). Four main masculinity cultural discourses that Kiesling talks about are mainly used within hegemonic masculinity, or the dominant group and they are: gender difference, heterosexism, dominance, and male solidarity (Kiesling, 2005:696). To be masculine means to be the opposite of feminine, to desire women only, to be authoritative and in control, and to form bonds with other men. Kiesling uses his study of men in a fraternity to explain how men negotiate these cultural discourses of masculinity within everyday conversation with each other. A significant finding is that the men utilize indirect speech methods (or linguistic forms) such as acts, stances, jokes, and insults to create and maintain homosociality (Kiesling, 2005:721).

In Kimmel's book on *Changing Men* (1987) Peter Lyman writes an essay on sexist jokes in male group bonding. Lyman conducts a case study on a group of fraternity men and sorority women, who were directed by university officials to discuss an event that happened at one of the sorority houses. The incident involved the fraternity men forcing the women to listen to a crude and inappropriate speech dealing with Freud's theory of penis envy while acting out masturbation techniques. A significant finding from the responses of the men involved was the idea of "cathartic laughter" as being a central part of homosocial bonding. (Lyman in Kimmel,

1987:155) When speaking to the men individually, many of them said they found many of their friend's jokes about women to be vulgar, but justified them because they were essential to forming bonds with the other men. The fraternal bond existed almost entirely off of this joking relationship (Lyman in Kimmel, 1987:155). Homosocial desire in men's interactions is non-masculine in itself, in that it is based on a desire to create a sort of bond and dependency on other men. Men have to balance creating homosocial desire and not homosexual desire (Kiesling, 2005:720). This is done by using these indirect methods of communicating their solidarity with one another. Homosocial desire is central to men's self-identity.

Media and Masculinity

Associations between consumption and beliefs

Sociologists have long noted the large role that media plays in reflecting and perpetuating gender norms and ideals. Though much of this work on media and culture has focused heavily on depictions of women in media and its correlates, some recent works have explored these ideas among men. They provide reason to believe that a historical review of images within a men's magazines can provide valuable insight as to how masculine stereotypes, norms, and expectations have changed and evolved over time. For example, in their review of men's magazines, Giaccardi et al. (2016) concluded the portrayals in the media are consistent and continue to reproduce a hegemonic masculinity that is centered on "power, financial status, aggressions, virility, and the objectification of women" (Giaccardi et al., 2016:160).

Some explanations of the relationships media and culture rely on cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998). This explanation argues that frequent exposure to consistent media themes or stereotypes leads viewers, over time, to cultivate or adopt beliefs about the real world that coincide with media content. Giaccardi et al. (2016) tested cultivation theory, examining male-

oriented media and men's perceptions and beliefs about masculinity. Using a survey of undergraduate men aged 18 to 25, they analyzed attitudes toward the male role (AMIRS), conformity to masculine norms (CMNI-46), and media consumption patterns. Results showed that consumption of men's magazines, along with reality TV programs, and sports programming emerged as significant predictors of men's conformity to masculine norms (Giaccardi et al., 2016: 158). More specifically, these types of media consumption were predictive of personal adherence to masculinity ideology—not only did the participants believe that men behaved a certain way in general; but they also responded that they too behaved in the traditional ways portrayed in the media (Giaccardi et al., 2016: 159). Media portrays a particular ideal when it comes to masculinity, and men enact these portrayals into their daily beliefs and behaviors.

Playboy Magazine

What are the magazines marketed almost exclusively to men? Among the first of its kind, many would argue that Playboy has become synonymous with men's magazine. Thus, it is not surprising that Playboy features prominently among scholarship in the area of men's media and masculinity, including debates regarding the cultural meaning and impact of the advent of the magazine and its publisher, Hugh Hefner. For example, Beggan & Allison (2001) posit that Playboy evolved in order to oppose historically traditional gender stereotypes rather than reinforce them. Using content analysis of the first ten years of Playboy magazine, the authors suggest that Playboy broadened the definition of masculinity, using multiple identity characteristics that are usually associated with women and femininity (such as fashion, cooking, etc). Beggan & Allison state that Playboy created a broader definition of masculinity through three main processes: 1) co-opting the meaning of the word "playboy"; 2) associating sexual

success with the possession of traditionally feminine traits, and; 3) using a rabbit as Playboy's symbol (Beggan & Allison, 2001: 2).

They later explored how men felt Playboy had affected them, and specifically hypothesized that “Playboy would play a significant role in defining the nature of masculinity for the participants, especially in ways that countered existing stereotypes about men” (Beggan & Allison, 2003: 3). They found that a majority of the men felt that the magazine had played a significant role in shaping their views and beliefs regarding sexuality and masculinity (Beggan & Allison, 2003: 10). Other literature talks about the struggles among young males to define masculinity without having the guidance of their fathers regard male roles and expectations. Beggan & Allison (2003) suggest that Playboy actually operated as a solution by providing a shared resource point, strengthening the fraternal bond between fathers and sons (Beggan & Allison, 2003:9). They argue that experiences of young males discovering Playboy content together, or fathers passing down copies of the magazines to sons, fostered the socialization of young males into their roles. Indeed, the messages purported by Playboy and its founder, Hugh Hefner, have been the subjects of considerable controversy, and several scholars have weighed in on their assessment of his masculine persona. For example, Coulter (2014) states

“The Playboy reader Hefner was targeting was not an average American male, he was just the opposite. He was a sophisticated, hedonistic, young consumer who was ready to experience both the commercial pleasures and sexual pleasures offered in the postwar era. He was more interested in bread buying than breadwinning, and as these roles moved in the sexual arena, he was more interested in casual sex than being the breadwinner in monogamous marriage. He was anything but average; he was a man of refined taste and sexual sophistication” (Coulter, 2014:142).

Furthermore, she notes that the playboy persona is a “manufactured illusion of an imagined audience, designed to sell a barely attainable fantasy of masculine decadence. It is not a visual amalgam of an actual readership” (Coulter, 2014:144).

Current Study

My study answers three general questions: (1) What are the defining characteristics of masculinity marketed to exclusive male consumer audience? Using content analysis, I identify and code visual and textual themes throughout the advertisements, identifying consistent patterns in content. Ad content was deconstructed based on pre-identified themes based on the literature, including such categories as things such as fashion/clothing, sophistication, leisure, noncommittal sexuality, etc., as well as on possible emerging themes during data analysis. (2) How do/does the masculine typology(ies) depicted among these advertisements resonate with contemporary men, particularly in regard to heterosexual men's relationships with women? I investigated the extent to which the modern reader market niche to which Playboy was originally marketed, heterosexual white men between 18 and 40, identify with and respond to Playboy's portrayals of masculinity. To what extent do today's young men validate the legitimacy of these ideals, both generally and/or personally? (3) If and how is the image of masculinity portrayed by 1950-70s Playboy still being culturally transmitted? If men are still subscribing to these definitions of ideal masculinity, how and where are they learning about these role expectations and ideals?

Methods

My study includes three methodological approaches: (1) a combination of content analysis with visual semiotic analysis, (2) construction of a contemporary image, (3) conducting focus groups.

Content Analysis (Phase I)

Holsti (1969) broadly defines content analysis as a useful technique for making inferences, in which the researcher objectively and systematically identifies themes and characteristics of messages (Holsti, 1969:14, Stemler, 2001:1). This method is applicable to text

and visual analysis of images. My initial investigation focused on analyzing the visual and textual material provided in the “What Sort of Man Reads Playboy?” (WSMRP) advertisement campaign featured from 1965 to 1975. These one-page advertisements were a marketing tool used to recruit subscription membership among casual readers and advertisers. All ads contained a picture and a detailed paragraph characterizing the magazine reader, which I refer to in this project as the “Playboy Reader,” (PR). Analysis of the ads looked for themes consistent with concepts found in the men and masculinity literature, including (but not limited to) hegemonic masculinity and homosocial desire. “The tradition of content analysis of texts has the advantage of yielding quantifiable information that enables strong inferences beyond the information yielded by a sample of texts” (Weber, 1985, Bell & Milic, 2014: 203).

Magazine content was uploaded and coded using Dedoose, a cross-platform application for qualitative and mixed methods research. Dedoose allows for recording and coding of audio, video, spreadsheet data, and for my purposes, photo and text data. Using this application, the Playboy Project team uploaded and coded all magazines from 1965 to 1975 including WSMRP materials. For my project, we coded identified patterns, particularly with regard to male-female attraction. That is, ad content was deconstructed based on pre-identified themes based on the literature, including categories such as fashion/clothing, sophistication, leisure, and noncommittal sexuality, etc. Other themes did emerge throughout the data analysis process.

The data coding strategy included emergent coding, which is defined by Stemler as establishing categories of themes and patterns after there is some previous preliminary examination (Stemler, 2001:3). This emergent coding was broken down into three phases, based on recommendations made by Stemler in (2001). In the first phase, project members did a preliminary “run-through” of the playboy ads independently to find common themes and

patterns. In the second phase, members compared codes and reconciled differences—consolidating final codes into the uniform codebook in the third phase. Key project members (including myself) independently revisited each image and text series, applying all codes as specified in the uniform code book and checking reliability among coders. All detectable meaningful aspects of the visual and text content was identified, including type of activities depicted, position of male and female gaze, symbols of wealth and success, occupational indicators, skills, personal traits, and descriptions listed.

Visual Semiotic Analysis

Content analysis techniques were consistent with visual semiotic analysis as outlined by Bell & Milic (2002). The authors argue that adding semiotic analysis allows for richer analysis altogether. Functional visual semiotics “relates texts to their particular cultural and situational contexts” (Bell & Milic, 2002:218), taking into account objective formal relationships (Bell & Milic, 2002:203).

In many ways, my analysis draws upon Goffman’s work on how advertisements perpetuate gender stereotypes. Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* (1979) is a classic qualitative sociological analysis of gender and the media. Although he focused mainly on portrayals of women in advertisements, I draw on some of his approaches, and his use of “gender displays” in my analysis of Playboy ads regarding masculinity. Goffman defines gender displays as “all of an individual’s behavior and appearance informs those who witness him, minimally telling them something about his social identity, about his mood, intent, and expectations, and about the state of his relation to them” (Goffman, 1979:1). Goffman argued that gender stereotypes were repeatedly depicted in these displays in advertisements as “hyper-ritualizations of social scenes”

(Bell & Milic, 2002:204) through six dimensions: relative size, the feminine touch, function ranking, the family, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal (Goffman, 1979).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) analyze Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*, focusing primarily on the formal features of the image across three principal dimensions of visual semiosis in relation to an image: (1) the representational dimension, (2) the interaction between the viewer and the image, and (3) the layout or composition (Bell & Milic, 2002:208-211). The representational dimension refers to conceptual processes within the image such as how the participants of the image are interacting. Examples of this would be the "eye-lines" between people within images (Bell & Milic, 2002:208). The second dimension focuses on the gaze, distance, and angles of the participants from the perspective of the viewer or reader. The third dimension includes how formal relations can be analyzed in terms of the position of the frame (Bell & Milic, 2002:211). These three principals were used within our content analysis. While a thorough visual semiotic analysis is beyond the scope of the current study, being sensitized to these insights within the traditional sociological content analysis framework, allowed me to more thoroughly deconstruct the images and detect both obvious and more subtle patterns and themes regarding masculinity throughout Playboy ads, examining not only what images are being displayed, but how they are being displayed.

Content Analysis Findings (PHASE I):

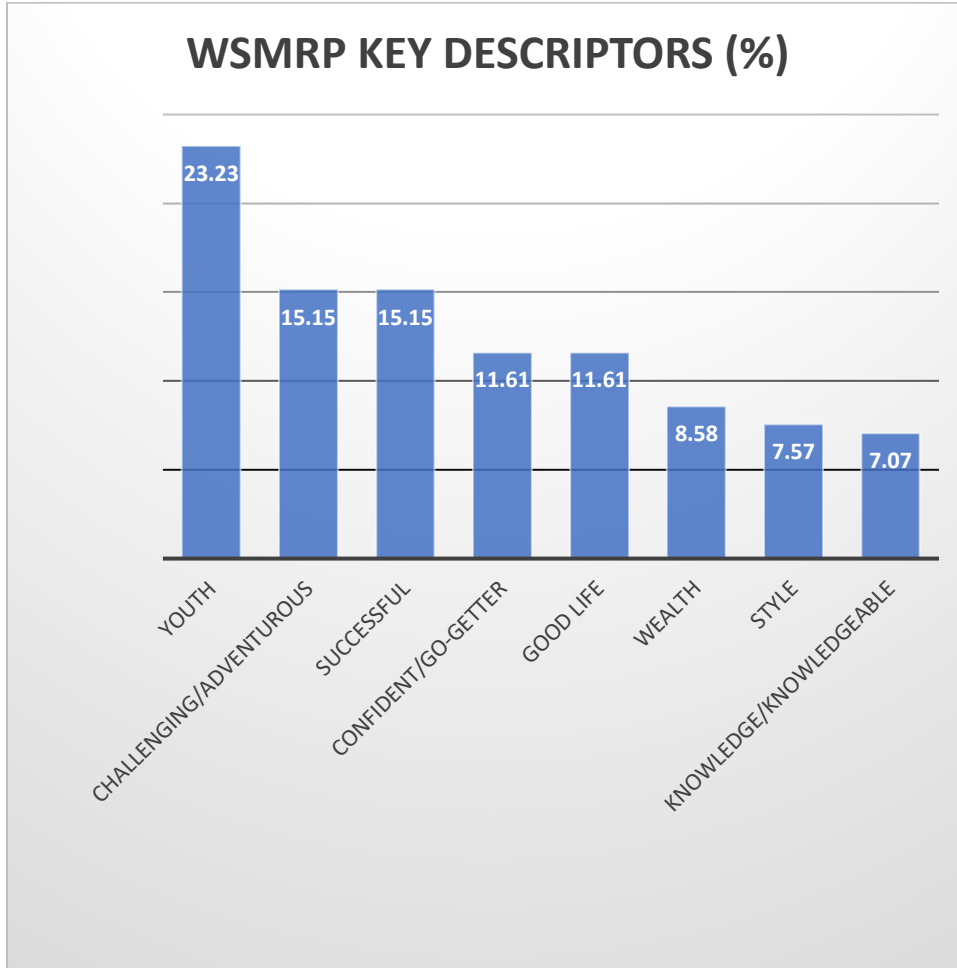
My first research question is answered through phase I of the project, the content analysis of the historical Playboy WSMRP ads. Each advertisement includes an image depicting the "Playboy reader" (PR). Images were primarily deconstructed with concepts relative to the PR. For example, gaze was coded with reference to whether the PR was looking at the other image subjects. Through the qualitative software Dedoose, we were able to identify the top defining

characteristics of masculinity, which were (in order): being youthful (46 codes), successful (30 codes), challenging/adventurous (30 codes), confident (23 codes), living the “good life” (23 codes) wealthy (17 codes), and knowledgeable (14 codes). The most common occupation that was portrayed was an executive/businessman (12 codes). Being admired by females or being the recipient of the “female gaze,” usually open one-directional (51 codes) was one of the most important factors in each image.

Content Analysis of the Text

The key descriptors that were coded within the text were words that described the PR as being youthful, successful, challenging/adventurous, confident, living the “good life,” wealthy, and knowledgeable. As shown in Chart/Figure 1, we can see each descriptor and the percent they are represented.

CHART 1



Through initial rounds of coding, there were 19 descriptors that were coded 265 times. Throughout the coding process, we narrowed it down to the top 8 descriptors which were coded 198 times. We can see here the most frequent descriptors broken down by percentage. Youthfulness was the most used descriptor at about 23%, followed by being adventurous and successful at 15%, confidence (12%), living the “good life,” wealth, style, and knowledge. For example, in the ad displayed below (Figure A) we can see evidence of some of these key terms.

FIGURE A



- Young
- Seeking new challenges
- Enjoys life to the fullest
- Sports adventure
- Problem solving
- Commanding lead
- Leadership lifestyle

WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A young man who likes to widen his world by always seeking new challenges, new ways to enjoy life to the fullest. Whether soaring off on a unique sports adventure or sitting down to solve a tough corporate problem, he sets a commanding lead. And PLAYBOY helps him enjoy this leadership life style. **FACT:** One out of four U.S. adult males reads PLAYBOY. Month after month, PLAYBOY reaches an adventurous audience over 18,000,000 strong. Want them to discover you? Put yourself in PLAYBOY. (Source: 1972 Simmons.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

Figure 1 Source: Playboy Magazine. July 1972.

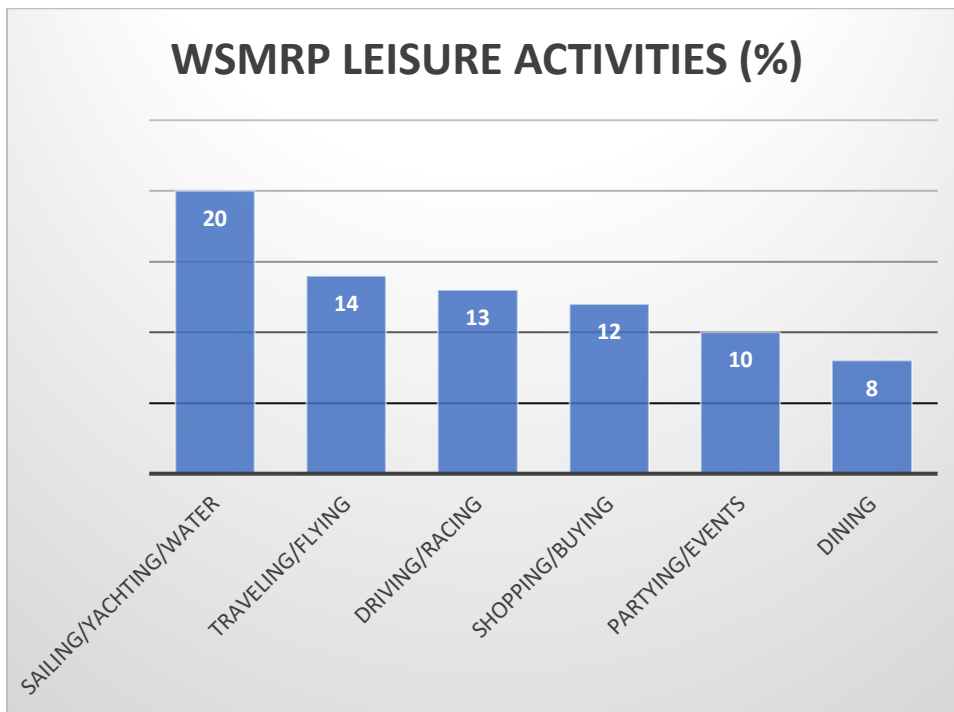
Content Analysis of the Image

The findings from the content analysis of the image are broken up into five sections: (1) Leisure Activities, (2) The Female Gaze, (3) Status Symbols, (4) The Woman in Red, and (5) Homosocial Themes. For each section, I use charts to display the percentage of time that these themes were codes, and also provide examples from the advertisements themselves.

Leisure Activities

Along with this idea of living the good life, the PR is depicted as spending a majority of his time on leisure activities. Shown in Chart 2 below are the top coded leisure activities.

CHART 2



There were 100 total codes for leisure activities. We see that about 20% of the leisure activities involved water activities such as sailing, boating, or yachting. Second to that was traveling and flying to destinations (14%), followed closely by racing and driving sporty vehicles (13%). 12% of the PR's leisure time is spent shopping and buying gifts for themselves and others. 10% is

spent attending and/or hosting events and parties, and 8% is spent fine dining. The remaining 23% of the time is spent doing other leisure activities such as skiing, hiking, hot air ballooning, etc. A significant theme found from the images is that although the PR values hard work and success, he always makes time to live life to the fullest and has both the time and the money to enjoy an abundance of leisure activities.

For example, we see in Figure B and Figure C depict leisure activities on the beach and sailing. Note, the activities here, like much of the images, depict highly social situations, with admiring and scantily clad, attractive female companions.

FIGURE B

FIGURE C



Figure 2. Playboy Magazine. January 1974.

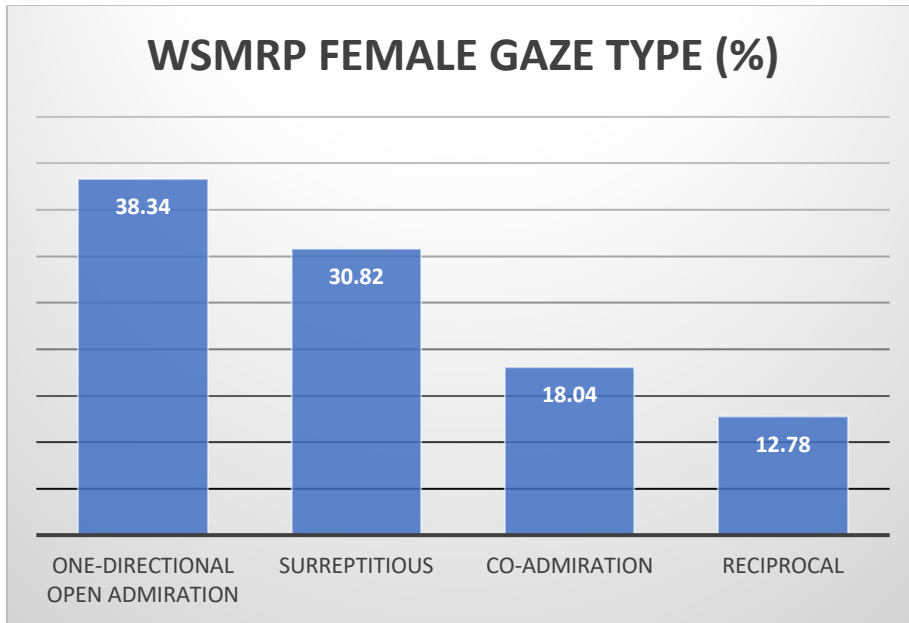


Figure 3. Playboy Magazine. April 1971.

The Female Gaze

One of the focal points of the ads is the admiring women. This depicts a PR that is strongly admired and sought after by women. Chart 3 presents the frequencies for gaze direction and symmetry across images, there were 122 total codes for female gaze type.

CHART 3



Specifically, the most commonly coded gaze pattern among images involved the “one-directional open admiration” gaze. This pattern has a woman looking longingly or coveting the PR, while he is seemingly oblivious to her presence. Similarly, the next most-frequent gaze involved the Surreptitious Glance. This positioning also portrays the PR’s apparent magnetism and attractiveness to females; he effortlessly draws the attention and fascination of women simply in the course of his usual activities. For example, in Figure D, the PR seems engaged in a conversation with one woman, who looks at him with open admiration, while a second woman looks on. He appears completely unaware of the second woman’s interest in him. Similar gaze depiction can be found in Figures E, F, and G.

FIGURE D



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A young man of today looking forward to tomorrow, who appreciates the best yesterday has to offer. With confidence in his sense of style, the PLAYBOY reader is first with the newest look—even when it's inspired by an older one. Helping him make the right fashion moves is his favorite magazine. Fact: PLAYBOY is read by nearly half of all young men who spent \$500-plus on apparel in the past year. To make it in today's fashionable young market place, put yourself in PLAYBOY. (Source: 1973 TGI.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

FIGURE E



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A man with a special talent for making winning decisions. Whether he's choosing a pretty tennis partner or selecting a magazine, his standards are the highest. That's why he's willing to pay full price for the one publication he prefers above all others. Fact: 7,000,000 copies of PLAYBOY are purchased for \$1 per copy or \$10 per year by readers who obviously pay full attention. Want a great return on your ad dollar? Play PLAYBOY—where the men are. (Source: A.B.C., December 31, 1972.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

Figure 4. Playboy Magazine. August 1974. Figure 5. Playboy Magazine. July 1973.

FIGURE F



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A personable guy whose personal appearance is his calling card. He knows that a big part of being welcome is being well-groomed. So he's particular about the toiletry brands he uses—and it pays off. Fact: PLAYBOY tops all magazines in men under 35 who are heavy users of shampoo, spray deodorant, men's cologne, hair spray and suntan lotion. If you want your brand to be his brand, talk to him in PLAYBOY. It will pay off big for you, too. (Source: 1970 Brand Rating Index.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

FIGURE G



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A young man who makes a "hit" at the box office, the PLAYBOY reader frequently enjoys two on the aisle and one on his arm. And when he's moved to entertainment, it's frequently to the movies. Facts: Nearly 1,000,000 tickets are sold to PLAYBOY male readers each week, the highest percentage of any magazine, double the national average. And it's this continuing interest in and search for the "best in entertainment" that keeps him coming back for PLAYBOY in increasing numbers each month. Current sale: over 3,000,000 copies a month. If you want to line him up for your production—or your product—PLAYBOY is definitely your best buy. (Source: 1965 Starch Consumer Magazine Report.)

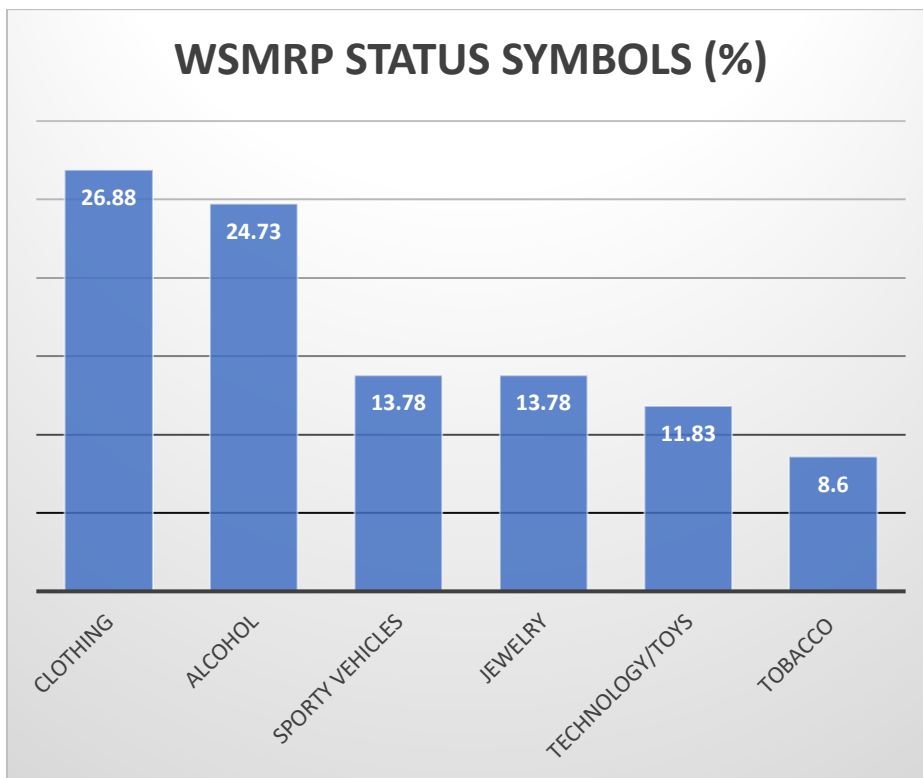
Advertising Offices: New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta

Figure 6. Playboy Magazine. July 1971. Figure 7. Playboy Magazine. August 1965.

Status Symbols

Another significant theme we found during coding was status symbols. The PR was depicted as having many luxurious and valuable commodities. Ads consistently showed “the finer things” including nice and fashionable clothing, expensive watches, and expensive alcohol and cigars. Even amongst alcohol, socioeconomic status is represented; the PR is drinking liquor, wine, or champagne, not beer. Below in Chart 4 are the most frequent status symbols.

CHART 4



Classy and nice clothing was the top status symbol representing about 27% of the total status symbols coded, this included business suits, dress coats, and linen outfits. Almost 25% of the status symbols coded were alcohol, usually champagne, cognac, liquor, etc). The remainder of the status symbols included sporty vehicles and motorcycles, jewelry, technology such as

computers, and tobacco. Figure H and Figure I are depictions of the ads that shows some examples of status symbols that were coded.

FIGURE H

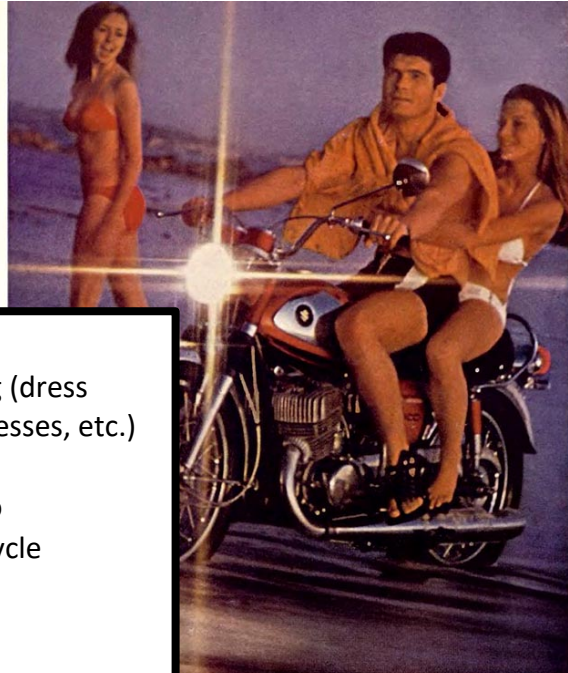


WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A young guy who's always in the limelight. With choice seats on the arm, he's a man who takes the lead others follow. Facts: PLAYBOY reaches more males 18-34 in cycle than any magazine. It's first among all monthlies in cycle advertisement performance record. If you'd like this young guy to start something obviously the place to rally. (Sources: P.I.B. and 1967 Simmons.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

FIGURE I



OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

And discerning women discover it quickly. And when it comes to starting a reader holds the key. Facts: PLAYBOY reaches more males 18-34 in cycle than any magazine. It's first among all monthlies in cycle advertisement performance record. If you'd like this young guy to start something obviously the place to rally. (Sources: P.I.B. and 1967 Simmons.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

- Clothing (dress coat, dresses, etc.)
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Motorcycle

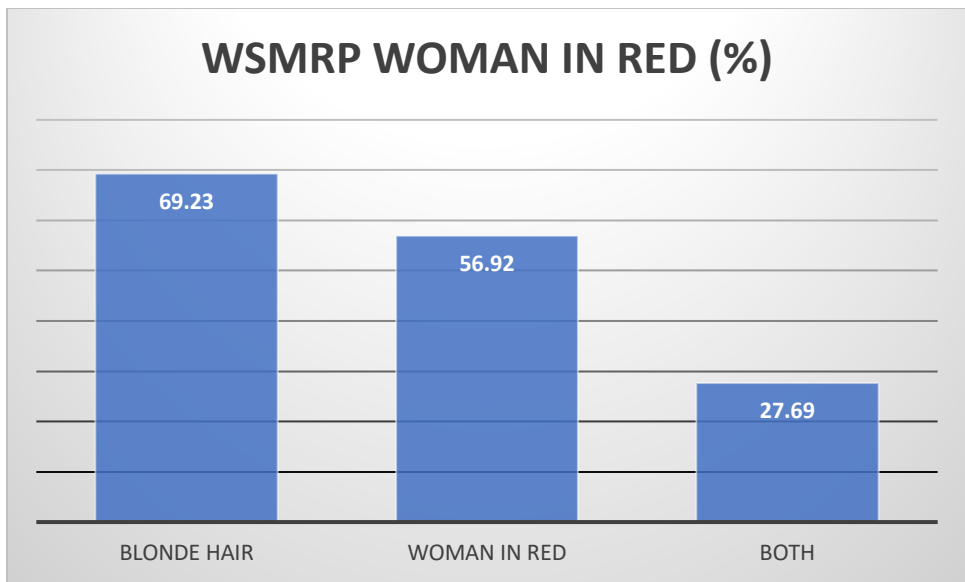
Figure 8. Playboy Magazine. October 1971

Figure 9. Playboy Magazine. May 1968.

The Woman in Red

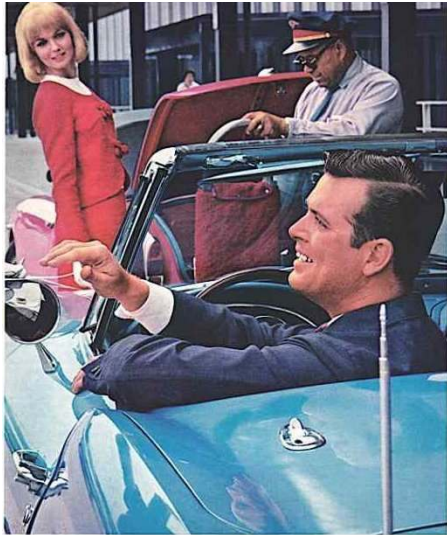
The theme of the “woman in red” was one that emerged when we began coding. After each member of the team had coded a subset of ads, we all came back with this same interesting finding. A large number of the ads had the woman who was in admiration of the PR, dressed in red. Previous research has established particular meanings and emotions of color symbolism in advertising. Clarke et al in 2008 conduct a qualitative study about the emotional connotations of colors. They found that warm color such as yellow, orange, and specifically red, evoke “active emotions such as love, anger, and passion” (Clarke et al., 2008:407). Chart 5 shows the percentages of the total ads (65) that included the woman in red.

CHART 5



Out of the 65 advertisements, about 70% included a woman with blonde hair, 57% included the woman in red, and 27% included a woman in red who also had blonde hair. Figures J through M below show examples of the woman in red throughout the advertisements.

FIGURE J



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A young executive with an eventful calendar, the PLAYBOY reader knows where he's going and the best way to get there. Facts: Of the entire U.S. population, one out of every five adults who rented a car within the last six months reads PLAYBOY. And PLAYBOY readers own one out of every five car-rental credit cards in active use across the nation. Get more mileage from your rent-a-car advertising. Run it in PLAYBOY. (Source: 1964 Standard Magazine Report by W. R. Simmons & Associates.)

Advertising Offices: New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta

FIGURE K



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

The kind that won't stay put. He's a young executive moving up and moving fast. And he takes off often in pursuit of pleasure as well as business—making beautiful connections along the way. Fact: PLAYBOY leads all monthly magazines in reaching men 18 to 49 who look right or more so than the rest of the population. If you want to fly them your way, sell them their way—PLAYBOY. It soars above the ordinary. (Source: 1967 B.A.I.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

Figure 9. Playboy Magazine. October 1965. Figure 10. Playboy Magazine. June 1968.

FIGURE L

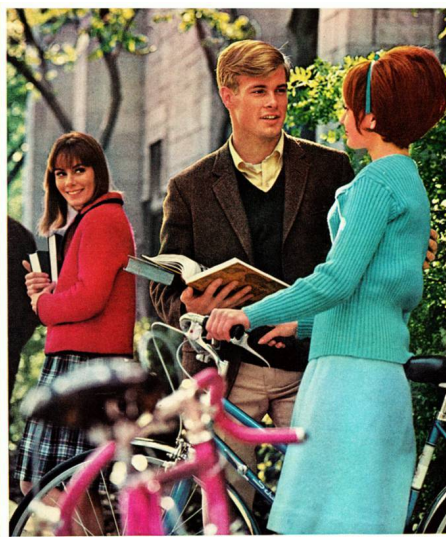


WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

A dedicated discophile who gets and gives good vibrations at his club, at concerts, at home and in his car. He's a mover who's always in sync with the latest sounds. Facts: PLAYBOY is read by half of all men under 35 who purchased record albums in the past six months. And PLAYBOY reaches more men 18 to 34 who own stereo-tape component systems and in-car tape equipment than any other magazine. Want to tune in to a sound market? Turn to PLAYBOY. (Source: 1970 Simmons.)

New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta • London • Tokyo

FIGURE M



WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY?

No lightweight when it comes to the books and a positive authority on distaff good looks, Playboy Man On Campus typifies the most knowledgeable, sophisticated generation of college students ever. Fact: Young men on campus now number over 3,000,000 and better than one out of every two reads PLAYBOY. With this booming collegiate market that annually spends millions on clothing and cars, toiletries and travel—PLAYBOY scores first. First in campus newsstand sales. First in retailer acceptance, with over 1000 fashion-right apparel stores now promoting PMOC. Playboy Man On Campus. The perfect meeting place for your product and this young man: PLAYBOY.

Advertising Offices: New York • Chicago • Detroit • Los Angeles • San Francisco • Atlanta

Figure 11. Playboy Magazine. February 1971. Figure 12. Playboy Magazine. September 1965.

Homosocial Themes

The theme of homosocial desire is displayed throughout all of the descriptions in the advertisements. Homosocial desire is men wanting to impress other men, and that is exactly what the ads do. The ads are attempting to market the “*perfect*” man to men. In this way, the advertisements symbolize the values, behavior, and lifestyles that marketers believed men wanted to be; what they believed men perceived to be ideal. The success of Playboy throughout this time and the length of the ad campaign suggests that this strategy was relatively effective in identifying these ideals. Through descriptions of confidence, success, money, women; the ads are saying “if you read Playboy, you can be this guy.” Playboy was aware of changing social dynamics and the shift away from the exclusively “breadwinners” and “family men” ideals for young men. In the post-war era, a new cohort of men in their early 20s began pursuing education and delaying marriage; the emergence of a proportion of the population as unmarried, educated men with early careers and disposable income created a new consumer niche. Playboy capitalized on this cultural shift, defining the “bachelor lifestyle” ideal as a new consumer market. Playboy recognized the opportunity to encourage men participate in activities such as shopping and caring about clothes and their appearance, expanding definitions of masculinity to incorporate more stereotypically feminine norms. For example, ads depict the PR as being a good entertainer, cook, conversationalist, and enjoying fashion, photography, and shopping. The ads play on homosocial desire here to reframe masculinity in this way. Incorporating these activities as part of the “bachelor lifestyle” gave men license to engaging in more “feminine” activities; engaging in such activities is being framed as “living life to the fullest and enjoying finer things” and is accompanied with being desired by women and abundant noncommittal sexual activity.

Contemporary Image (Phase II)

The creation of the contemporary image was undertaken as part of this project which we named the “Playboy Project,” a collaborative project between sociology and anthropology faculty affiliates of the UA Visual Anthropology Lab. The Visual Anthropology Lab is dedicated to examining how aspects of culture can be pictorially interpreted and expressed, and how images can be understood as products, instruments, and conduits of culture. The VA team deconstructed the historical images, identifying display themes, including body positioning, gaze, body language patterns, activities portrayed, facial expressions, etc., and constructed a contemporary equivalent of the historical image. The purpose of this image was to help create a talking point for gathering feedback on masculinity among focus groups.

Constructing the Image (PHASE II)

My second and third research questions are explored through phase II and phase III of the project. Using themes we coded during the content analysis, we constructed a contemporary image to show to the focus groups. The VA team based the contemporary image off of a few chosen historical images, specifically one that can be found in Figure N below. Models were selected to pose in the photograph, and we held two different photo sessions at a couple of locations. Because the most depicted leisure activity coded in the advertisements were those that took place on or by the water, we had a vision of the photo incorporating a body of water. Unfortunately, the photo session was on a day that it rained, which led us to take a majority of the photos indoors. We wanted the photo to be consistent with the upscale social environment often depicted among the advertisements. Photographs were taken in a variety of settings. The final images used in study were taken (with permission) at The Inn at Carnall Hall, a historic

boutique hotel. Within the hotel, the photo session took place at Lambeth Lounge, an upscale cocktail lounge popularly used for University and faculty functions.

Throughout the sessions, three different men portrayed the PR, with combinations of other women and men in the photos. From over one hundred photos, the team narrowed it down to two images; the images were consistent in their composition, with one key exception: one featured a younger PR (early 20s), shown in Figure O, and the other used an older PR (early 30s), shown in Figure P. The two competing PR portrayals were pre-tested among samples of undergraduate students. We piloted both images and gathered feedback from men and women in two undergraduate sociology courses. We then surveyed approximately 18 men from a random sample on the campus courtyard and classroom hallway. In the survey, we asked men to view both images and then select which of the two men did they find more attractive to them (we also asked which one did they believe would be more attractive to women-this was consistent with their initial selection). Based on this collective feedback, we selected the image featuring the older PR, as displayed in Figure P below. Interestingly, confidence level was the biggest influence in test subjects' preference; men reported that they preferred the older PR because they believed he displayed more confidence than the younger PR.

When constructing the updated text to accompany the contemporary image, I wanted to be as consistent as possible with the original text, yet still timely and relevant for current cultural standards. Thus, the historical text served as the foundation for the contemporary text, but was de-identified and slightly updated. After reviewing all of the advertisements, a representative text (consistent and representative of much of the historical advertisement content) was selected by the research team. This text was then modified to correspond with the contemporary image. The original text read:

“WHAT SORT OF MAN READS PLAYBOY? A man with good reason to celebrate. He’s youthful, aware, well educated, with a future that looks bright indeed. While he has big plans for the years to come, he’s also living life to its fullest right now. And he can well afford to. FACT: Playboy is read by 50% of men with incomes of \$25,000 and over. That’s more than is reached by any other medium. Want a sound resolution for the New Year? Spend more time in Playboy.”

The updated text includes a de-identified magazine and the salary equivalent (based on current dollars, calculated using inflation calculator from 1975 to 2019). It reads:

“WHAT SORT OF MAN READS _____? A man with good reason to celebrate. He’s youthful, aware, well educated, with a future that looks bright indeed. While he has big plans for the years to come, he’s also living life to its fullest right now. And he can well afford to. FACT: _____ is read by 50% of men with incomes of \$96,000 and over. That’s more than is reached by any other medium. Want a sound resolution for the New Year? Spend more time in _____.”

The VA team was also interested in a possible “historical priming” effect, in that those who viewed an obviously older image might be prompted to respond differently than those who see a contemporary image. This may be particularly the case when discussing issues related to masculine ideal, gender roles, and cultural shifts. While exploring this thoroughly was beyond the scope of the current project, I chose to make an initial investigation in this regard. To this end, one male focus group was shown a historical image to determine if and how responses differed based time in which the image was taken. Interestingly, although men commented on the “dated” clothing and quickly surmised that the image was older, their responses to the relevant research questions in the current investigation did not substantively differ from the historical vs. contemporary image groups. The historical image (Figure N) was shown to the male participants with the exact same description underneath as the contemporary image. This historical image was one of the examples that we based the contemporary image off of. The main visuals that we wanted to convey through the contemporary image are that there are two main women, one who is engaged in conversation with the “playboy,” and one who is admiring from afar, who we call

the “woman in red.” We noticed with a multitude of the historical ads that the admiring female was usually dressed in red and had blonde hair. We also wanted the image to be in an upscale social setting. In both the historical and the contemporary image, the following themes are consistent: they feature a social setting, a blonde, admiring woman with a one-directional open-admiration female gaze, a brunette woman directly engaged with the PR, drinking of alcohol, and well-dressed (dress-casual style) subjects.

FIGURE N



Figure 13. Playboy Magazine. October 1973.

FIGURE O



Figure 14.

FIGURE P



Figure 15.

Focus Groups (Phase III)

The third phase of my project involved gathering data via focus groups. Using the contemporary image and text, focus groups explored the extent to which these 1960s masculine descriptors still resonated with young men today. Conducting focus groups is a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. It locates the interaction in a group discussion as the source of data and acknowledges the researcher's active role in creating the group discussion for data collection (Morgan, 1996:130). Morgan (1996) outlined several criteria for conducting focus groups. For example, sociological research relying on this method usually involves 4 to 6 focus groups, each consisting of about 6 to 10 participants in each focus group. An overview of the focus group guide is provided in Appendix B.

The playboy project team conducted six male focus groups in reserved locations on campus (for easy access and familiarity among participants). The target sample consisted of white, heterosexual males, between 18 and 40 although other sexual orientation, and race groups were allowed for possible subsequent comparisons (Morgan, 1996). Each focus group was led

by a male to improve the accuracy of the responses. Social research suggests that facilitator gender may impact focus group responses. Specifically, Kimmel refers to the homosocial aspect of masculinity in many of his works, noting key differences in how men act and behave to impress other men, particularly when discussing relationships with women. A list of the focus group questions is provided in Appendix C.

Participants were recruited through invitation, email requests and flyers distributed among Introductory General Sociology courses. By using the introductory courses as a recruitment method, the goal was to get a representative sample of males in regard to school major. Because of the large size of the introductory courses, this gave us a sufficient recruitment pool. The original goal was to obtain 24-40 males in total for the focus groups. In total, we successfully recruited 48. There is a multitude of previous research that has used this same recruitment method with undergraduates such as Giaccardi et al. (2016). A copy of the recruitment flyer is located in Appendix D. Upon arrival, participants were assigned a random number-identifier and randomly sorted into groups; they also completed a brief demographic profile that included their race, age, and sexual orientation. The information presented here draws from 6 focus groups. Groups varied in size from 6-10 men, and averaged approximately 60-80 minutes.

Data Analysis

A total of 48 men participated in the focus groups. Ages ranged from 18 to 27, with a mean age of 20.06. The majority of the participants were white and self-identified as heterosexual. 75% of the participants were white, while 25% were nonwhite [Among nonwhite participants, 14.6% self-identified as Black, 6.25 %Hispanic/Latino, 4.17% Asian]. With regard to sexual orientation, about 90% self-identified as heterosexual. Focus group facilitators started with introductions, having each participant go around the circle and say aloud (for help with the

recorder) their given confidential number (used in lieu of names) and their favorite restaurant. This strategy helped to clarify note taking and transcription and helped the men to feel more comfortable speaking aloud. The men were then asked a series of questions (listed in Appendix C), beginning with specific questions regarding the WSMRP image: what they first noticed about the image, how they were different from or similar to the man in the image, whether or not they thought most men would want to be like the man in the image. Subsequent questions covered more general topics of masculinity (what they thought was “masculine,” where they learned this from, what made an “ideal man,” what they thought women desired in men, etc.). The following is a discussion of the findings from their responses.

Focus Groups Selected Findings (PHASE III)

Through the focus groups, we gathered a vast amount of data, some beyond the scope of this paper. To answer our specific research questions, I organize our findings into four main themes or concepts based on quotes from the focus groups:

1. *“Men are the Ones Making the Bread”*: The Historical Roles Persist
2. *“Badass Times 20”*: Homosocial Desire and Getting Women to Impress Men
3. *“He Kind of Seems Like a Douche”*: Status Envy and Denigrating the Alpha Male
4. *“It Takes Less to Be a Man Nowadays”*: Confusion and Ambivalence Regarding Current Gender Roles

Theme 1: “Men are the Ones Making the Bread”: The Historical Roles Persist

When the men were asked what it meant to be “masculine,” the top descriptors were confident, strong, tough, and a provider. Consistent with much of the literature on masculinity, the historical sex roles that defined masculinity were still the primary responses provided. The “historical” male role models remained a prevailing theme throughout the focus group

discussions. Across groups, responses to the question: “What does it meant to be masculine or manly?” included the following:

“when you’re conditioned to be tough”

“being the one to bring home the money”

“able to support the family”

“you don’t show your emotions too much”

The Je ne sais quoi/Confidence. Similarly, confidence and “swagger” or charisma were frequently reported traits to which the men aspired. When describing the “ideal” man, participants said being masculine was just a certain way of carrying and presenting yourself. Typical responses to the question “What is the ideal man?” included:

“You can tell by someone like their strut, like one time I saw this guy walking down Dickson [street], and I was like, dude this kid walks super weird...he has a really feminine walk.”

“You can just tell by how people carry themselves and the way they talk”

“I think just like anybody being able to handle a situation well...like someone who knows exactly what to do when they enter a room.”

When asked where the men think they learned what these masculine ideals from, the top response was from their families, followed by their fathers, society, and finally from media such as what they saw in tv shows and movies. Many of the men said that their ideas of what it meant to be masculine came from the types of families they or their friends had:

“I mean, just where like I’m from, it’s just a lot of like, men are the ones making the bread [money] and women are just stay at home moms and like [inaudible] and stuff. So, I would say that’s just been put in my head like men are supposed to provide for their families and stuff.”

“There are more families I know where there might be a stay at home mom rather than a stay at home dad. Or like, just generally speaking the dad might make more than the mom.”

The discussant asked “What do women desire in men?” Findings suggest historical roles are also persistent in the young men’s ideas of what women desire in men. A majority of the responses when asked about this centered on women wanting a man with money, confidence, security, and someone to provide for them. Responses included:

“Most women will act like he’s a douche bag and what not, but I feel like when it comes down to it...he’s got the face, he’s got the money, the charisma...they fold...the legs open.”

This particular participant was responding specifically to how women would view the man that was portrayed in the contemporary image.

“[Women] want to have intellectual connect[ion]...and to be fucked hard.”
[Others laughed in agreement]

The top two responses for “what women desire in men” was (1) money and wealth; and (2) confidence. Some other responses were someone that is powerful, educated, a provider, and a protector. One of the main themes was that most of the men believed that women desired to be taken care of, more than anything.

“Women like the idea of being taken care of and having someone to make them feel good...[and] protection.”

And there was also the idea that what women desire changes over time:

“In high school, it’s like the douche-y jock, and then in college there’s the frat guy, then after they might go for someone that’s kind and caring.”

Some men did comment on how gender equality and feminism have played a role in changing norms in society:

“I was just gonna say with feminism and equality and stuff like that women think they can do the same things as men, and so instead of having kids they go out and get careers so they don’t need someone to provide for them and stuff like that.”

Although the men seemed to be aware of changing norms in society, specifically such as women having careers, earning money, and getting married and having children later in life, the

historical idea that men should be the providers and protectors was still very much a part of how the men viewed masculinity and their own value as a man.

“It’s more of a thing for women to be out in the world and have jobs and carry themselves, but [it’s] still expected for men to[be] head of household and make the rules and be the primary care giver and to work a lot and not be really a stay at home kind of dad.”

Though the men understand that women’s roles are changing, they don’t necessarily seem to believe that their own roles as men has changed in society.

Theme :2 “Badass Times 20”: Homosocial Desire and Getting Women to Impress Men

In many of the groups, one of the first issues raised was concern regarding the lack of a “beta male” in the social setting. That is, the men noted that there were no other men in the image, which was very off-putting for the men. Responses included:

“He’s the only guy in the picture and he’s surrounded by girls.”

“I think it’s kind of weird that its only females, like he’s not out with any guy friends or anything like that.”

Although being desired by women seemed to be a large part of being masculine, it seemed to not matter as much when not in the presence of other men. It was as if a man meeting and flirting with women requires the presence of other men. This supports Kimmel’s ideas relative to homosocial desire; as he explains:

“Women have, in men’s minds, such a low place on the social ladder of this country that it’s useless to define yourself in terms of a woman,” noted playwright David Mamet. “What men need is men’s approval.” Women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood” (Kimmel, 2005: 33).

Evidence of homosocial desire were consistently demonstrated throughout the group discussions. While there are several things that men bond over, homosocial desire emphasizes the role of women as objects for male group socialization. In the focus groups, the men seemed

to largely bond over one thing in particular: women. Conversations involved not just talking about wanting to have sex with or attract women, but also about women in general. Throughout every focus group, most laughter came from when the discussion was focused on women. Just as men shared laughter about how women “want to be fucked hard”, the men seemed to bond and laugh together when it came to commenting on the women in the photo. This relates to the literature’s discussion of cathartic laughter. From Kimmel and Lyman’s work, cathartic laughter and jokes are usually about women. (Lyman in Kimmel, 1987:155) Each response below got a conspicuous amount of laughter from fellow men when asked their thoughts concerning the women in the image:

“The one in the white has got big cans.”

“Maybe not, because...by the size of her wrists, I don’t see a lot of bone.” /

“Um yeah I said the girl he’s talking to looks a little plump and the one behind him...she’s a straight dime and she’s eyeing him.”

“Her hand looks cool.” [laughter]

This participant was alluding to the way that the woman in the photo was gripping or “stroking” the martini glass in what they believed to be in a sexual way.

Discussions involving critique of women’s appearance were abundant and conversation flowed easily. It was common for participants to comment on and criticize the women’s appearance, weight, attractiveness, apparent sexual approachability. Throughout the focus groups when inappropriate comments were made regarding the women in the photo or responses about women in general, most men nodded their heads, laughed, and agreed. Whether or not they agreed privately, is hard to know, but this homosocial desire absolutely played a role in the focus groups and the men’s responses. Aside from when they were talking about women, one of the

topics that homosocial desire came through in was when the men discussed some models of masculinity.

Models of Masculinity

In some of our focus groups, the men ended up talking about who might be some male role models, or men who embody what it means to be masculine. There were a few different answers such as action figures Chuck Norris, Liam Neeson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and athletes such as Lebron James and Tiger Woods. But it was particularly interesting when a man named Dan Bilzerian was mentioned by one participant, all of the men became noticeably enthusiastic when talking about him.

Dan Bilzerian

When asked by the facilitator who Bilzerian was, one participant described:

“He was young and in college then went to start playing poker with celebrities, slowly got his way in parties with celebrities...starting doing million-dollar hands with celebrities. Then he just started his brand with a lifestyle like that....and a bunch of guys like us follow him and think wow that’s the lifestyle... we should do that. And he lives at like this huge pad....[with like women around with massive tits and ass]”

“He is the epitome of what most males want to be like.”

“He is a badass times twenty.”

Pictured below are some examples of pictures that are posted to Bilzerian’s Instagram account.



Figure 16. Bilzerian, Dan, July 2017. Instagram.

https://www.instagram.com/p/BWxBtaEFFa8/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link



Figure 17. Bilzerian, Dan, October 2018. "I'm only doing this for @ignite." Instagram photo. https://www.instagram.com/p/BoyGs8VfVsb/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link



Figure 18. Bilzerian, Dan, February 2016. "Date Night." Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BBjExe9oDkw/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

The men see Bilzerian's lavish lifestyle involving mansions, boats, and private jets filled with naked women...and they want that. Obviously, we cannot generalize and say that all men aspire to be like Bilzerian, but it was fascinating that his name caused so much excitement among the young men when brought up, much more than when any other model of masculinity was mentioned.

Theme 3: "He Kind of Seems Like a Douche": Status Envy and Denigrating the Alpha Male

The men in the focus groups were also asked about what they thought about the man in the image, and whether or not they think most men would want to be like this man. One of the

interesting findings was that confidence was both a positive and a negative attribute of the man in the image. Some of the participants found it to be a positive attribute:

“It kind of makes him appear like he has a strong self-confidence when you look at him, his face is intense.”

While some found it to be a negative attribute:

“He might be a little arrogant /He kind of seems like he’d be cocky/ a douche /[he] seems like kind of cocky or overly confident.”

When asked if they would want to be friends with the man in the image, the responses indicated that most of the men would not because they did not have what he had. Responses included:

“In some sense, yes, but also I think being friends with him would put pressure on you to be as [inaudible] as he is...if you were to hang out with him all of the time and people saw you together...”

“You’re like in his shadow... you’re not your own person.”

There was a sense of jealousy when it came to talking about being friends with the man in the image. Although all of the men strived to be confident, successful, have fun; they found that an abundance of those things was not necessarily a good thing. The irony is that the man shown in the image, isn’t much different than the Dan Bilzerian role model that they admire so much.

They exude much of the same qualities; success, wealth, confidence. Yet, they find the man in the image to be less appealing, and someone they wouldn’t want to be friends with. I hypothesize the reason for this difference is that they see the man in the image as someone they could be compared to, which enables them to recognize the insecurities they might feel if they were in the same room as this guy. However, they see Bilzerian as someone almost fictional, someone they would never be realistically compared to.

Theme 4: “It Takes Less to Be a Man Nowadays”: Confusion and Ambivalence Regarding Current Gender Roles

The existing literature on this topic claims that we have been/are in a transformative period for masculinity, or even a crisis, one where men are unsure of the expectations of them because of the changes in masculinity norms. We asked the men in the focus groups whether or not they believed expectations of men and masculinity have changed and/or are changing. The majority of the men agreed that expectations are changing.

When they men were asked, “Do you think that expectations for men have changed?” Responses included:

“Back in the day all of the men had set jobs, like hard working men were farmers, agriculture, or they had certain jobs. Now they may take on less roles or more womanly jobs, stuff like that.”

“Back in the day there was more of a schedule, you got married and had kids, had a 9-5 jobs, but now marriage rates are dropping because men fare away from traditional lifestyle or life in general....some guys just want to be bachelors the rest of their lives and that’s acceptable and okay...slowly getting there.”

“I feel like it takes less to be a man, nowadays. Especially in the eyes of older men looking back, I don’t know, times have just changed and we’ve gotten a little softer.”

“Like my dad would say how his dad would never show affection, would never tell him he loved him or was proud of him... my dad would never do that to me...he’s very affectionate. I think it’s a difference in how child rearing isn’t necessarily the same and associated with masculinity.”

“I think men aren’t expected to do as much as they used to be.”

“I mean I hear a lot of dads talking about this but I feel like in our generation especially back then when they were our age, quitting wasn’t an option like if you were a man...now a days I feel like in our generation its easy just to quit and it be okay.”

“I think there has been a change to be more sensitive I guess, or not as much putting on a mask, or bottle things up I guess.”

Some of the participants did not feel that expectations have changed or are changing:

“I think from what I’ve seen, from where I’m from, I don’t think that the expectations from a man has changed, even over the past years they still expect the man to be the breadwinner...”

“Like if you’re wife makes more money than you, you’re gonna think that you’re not very manly.”

“[It’s] still expected for men to [be] head of household and make the rules and be the primary care giver and to work a lot and not be really a stay at home kind of dad.”

There did seem to be some acceptance of what the men said has changed with regards to masculinity, there was no direct evidence of push back, but some subtle responses such as:

“If you grew up relatively normal, you’d probably agree with everything that’s been said in the room, but if you grew up in fairytale land then the answer would be there’s no such thing as masculinity, you’d be like masculinity is whatever you want it to be.”

There was notable discussion about gender and identity. The fact that they discussed gender and sexuality in a thoughtful way (albeit more or less accurately) suggests that there is a willingness to think critically and be open to evolving discussion on these issues. Below is taken from one of the focus groups and is part of the conversation on gender roles and ideals:

R: “Yeah can you even be a man now with as many different ways, you’ve got like 67 different genders that they came out with...is there even such thing as a man? I mean I personally only think there are two and that’s just me...but if there’s 67 different kinds then...”

R: “There’s your biological gender and then there’s your sexual orientation, we learned about this in class, there’s like two different ones. There are only two biological ones.”

R: “Your gender is dictated by your anatomy, but I’m pretty sure your sexual orientation is who you’re attracted to.”

R: “Wouldn’t there only be two though?”

R: “Well that’s different than how you identify yourself?”

R: “I feel like there’s so many different ways you can identify yourself.”

R: "I feel like society is shifting away from masculinity and femininity...you are who you are."

R: "Years ago, they would've not accepted people being who they are today, but I agree they can be who they think they are."

R: "I think it's tough to say if you agree...it's hard for me to understand someone who says like, I'm a unicorn... or something."

R: "Yeah you also can't call them on that or you're hating on them."

Although they have some confusion about definitions of gender, sexual orientation, and other terms, they are participating in the conversation, and seemingly attempting to understand the recent changes in society. Although comments like "I'm a unicorn" seem to mock these issues, others contributed in more thoughtful and critical ways. What is promising about my findings is that the men were aware of changes in society happening around them, and that they presented an openness and willingness to have a conversation about them. This can be seen in the discussion where the men are inquiring from one another about the meanings of gender and sexual orientation, and the ways in which thinking has transitioned about these terms over the years. Even if they were not completely accurate in explaining the terms, I found their readiness to discuss the issues to be very promising for future discussions.

Summary of Findings

In several ways, my findings support important themes found among the existing literature. Both content analysis and the focus groups reaffirmed the defining characteristics of masculinity consistent with hegemonic masculinity in previous works. The dominating definition of masculinity is the one that depicts men as being both physically tough or strong, being a leader and taking control of situations, taking on challenges, being confident, successful, and both a provider and a protector. I also found considerable evidence of homosocial desire both in

the men's advertising and the responses from the focus groups. In the Playboy's WSMRP ads, the men are shown as being young, handsome, well-dressed men who "have it all": the money, the success, and most importantly, effortlessly attract beautiful women. Even though they are shown with characteristics that have been oft-considered feminine, such as cooking, caring about fashion, grooming, etc., the fact that they are easily desired by attractive women, defines them as attractive and aspirant to other men. Men can aspire to be these things because it enables them to be successful, confident, and get women, which is central to their masculinity.

In the focus groups, men use cathartic laughter around the discussion of women's appearance and how to get women in general. They also gave some evidence to support that getting women mattered most within the presence of other men. When socializing and "picking up" women, the presence of other men confederates is culturally required. Specifically, men shown the photo of the PR surrounded exclusively by women commented on the bizarreness of going out without any men friends. If the goal is to get women, why would it matter whether or not other men were around? The literature suggests, and my findings support, that this requirement is due to homosocial desire; men evaluate themselves and their status based on how they think they are perceived from the perspective of other men.

Limitations

As with any project, my study has limitations. Unfortunately, although we recruited a large sample of men for the focus groups, we had no participants self-identify as any other sexual orientation other than heterosexual. While my sample was useful for looking at hegemonic masculinity among predominantly from white, heterosexual men, a larger sample of nonwhite, men with other sexual orientations would have allowed for more in-depth exploration of sexualities and non-binary groups, such as exploring Connell's theory of multiple masculinities.

It would be useful to explore responses from other racially homogenous focus groups (such as a group of young, black men) to see if there are major differences in how they describe masculinity. In addition, limited time and resources prohibited me from placing observers in each focus group. Doing so could have documented changes in body language and nonverbal cues (such as nodding, shifting in chairs, etc.) to provide some insight regarding comfort or discomfort with particular topics, agreement, or other areas in which comparisons between verbal responses and alignment physical indicators are informative.

Although I drew visual semiotic analysis as a sensitizing concept in the content analysis, such as the “Woman in Red” phenomena, more in-depth VSA was beyond the scope of the current project. Nevertheless, key insights were gleaned for future investigation during content analysis and focus groups. For example, I have learned that colors are frequently associated with particular emotional meanings such as red being a color that insights feelings of passion and love (Clarke et al., 2008:407). In addition, groups commented frequently on the placement of a woman’s hand as sexually suggestive or meaningful (such as whether her hand was “stroking” a martini glass). Future research should also look closer into the color symbolism and other visual semiotic symbols associated with masculinity in advertising, especially in more modern media.

The current study also focused exclusively on men. Note this begs questions regarding how men’s descriptions of what women want aligned with women’s responses regarding their actual preferences. The larger project did collect information from 5 additional focus groups with exclusively women participants. I am currently in the process of transcribing these recordings. These and other sex-based comparisons were beyond the scope of the current study but will be explored in future investigations.

Discussion and Conclusion

While some scholars argue that there is currently a “masculinity crisis”, my findings question whether current social changes are phenomenologically experienced in the ways constituting a “crisis”. Whereas the term “crisis” connotes catastrophic imagery and emotions such as fear, panic, anxiety, focus groups lacked such strong emotive energy in this regard. I found little to suggest that the men in my focus groups felt under attack or in crisis mode. They were aware and, when prompted, could discuss changes in gender roles and norms. They acknowledged shifting roles and the redefinition of masculinity and what it means to be a man. They did not seem particularly opposed to these shifts, nor they did not truly identify with them. Rather, they seemed removed from them, disengaged from the larger public discussion. Most of the men, when asked whether it was a good or bad thing that expectations are changing, responded with apathy and indifference. When asked whether they considered these changes to be good or bad, they typically said that it did not matter to them, and it did not affect them personally.

While considerable social science and prevention research documents the multitude of physical, emotional, and behavioral consequence of hegemonic masculinity for both men and women, the lack of salience for these men was alarming. The men were not inimical to redefining masculinity *for other men*; they themselves did not embrace it when discuss their own masculinity expectations. A few were apathetic. One possibility is that the “crisis” is cohort-related, such that resistance and panic regarding cultural shifts in masculinity is experienced by older males. Statistics findings high levels of support for gay marriage and other social issues suggests this may be the case (Pew Research Center, May 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>).

Another possibility is because of the dominance of white, heterosexual males in the groups, they were “flexing” their privilege in a way. The men were operationalizing whiteness by disregarding any possibility that they were affected by these changing definitions of masculinity. Though this demographic of men that displayed a hegemonic masculinity are the ones that are setting the script for masculinity, they had a recognition of the power they had to distance themselves from the conversation happening at the macro level. This distance allows for a lack of accountability on the men’s part. By flexing their privilege, I mean that because they are a part of the dominant group, they feel like they don’t have to be involved in any broadening or redefinitions of masculinity. “Moreover, by being removed, power remains invisible” (Kiesling, 2001:112). Kiesling explains that the men may not be consciously displaying their social hegemony, but are still accomplishing it through indirect ways (Kiesling, 2001:102).

Race and the intersections of race, class, and gender play a critical role in the definitions of masculinity and the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. I acknowledge that the current project did not address these issues. Doing so was beyond the time and scope of the current study. An intersectional analysis could be an entire project on its own, and I simply could not give this area the adequate theoretical and analytical attention it so greatly deserves. My content analysis found that only one out of 65 total ads included a nonwhite subject. In addition, white males dominated the discussion among all focus groups. None of the groups acknowledged how race and status frame their understandings of masculinity. Playboy was obviously marketing to the dominant group with the requisite disposable income. The masculine “ideals” identified in Playboy, and perpetuated among the focus groups, are in some ways synonymous with white, heterosexual, men of privilege; the equivalence of whiteness and status with masculinity and the

deconstruction of power dynamics in the perpetuation of masculine roles is certainly an area for further analysis.

One implication here is that despite the considerable efforts for social change undertaken primarily by women, non-binary people, and other marginalized groups, these efforts are stymied by the lack of investment among this group. Hegemonic masculinity and ideas of masculinity are changing, but progress is hindered by those who perceive (albeit inaccurately) the benefit or relevance for themselves. This key demographic group is less involved in such transformation. This stresses the importance of contemporary role models in redefining “ideal men”.

I found that many young, white, heterosexual men still embrace the historical characteristics of masculinity, and are largely disengaged from conversations on shifting masculinity norms and pivotal movements such as the well-known #MeToo. This key demographic continues to associate masculinity with toughness, aggression, and control. For these men, we have a disconnect between macro level social movements that they acknowledge have merit in theory, and the micro-level hegemonic masculinity to which they remain resigned in their everyday lives. Violence prevention and behavioral health efforts must find ways to reconcile this discontinuity and meaningfully connect with this population.

One promising effort is the emergence of male role models who embrace these redefinitions of masculinity. While traditional masculine roles models such as Dan Bilzarian, Liam Neeson, and Chuck Norris are abundant, those models which challenge hegemonic masculinity are relatively lacking. A notable exception is an actor and activist Justin Baldoni. In 2018, Baldoni, most famously known for his role as the sexy romantic interest and leading man in the T.V. show “Jane the Virgin” led a TED talk titled “Why I’m Done Trying to be Man Enough”. In this talk, he shared his thoughts, ideas, and experiences of questioning and

rethinking the historical narratives of masculinity. He notes that his fan base is largely women, and that he has struggled with trying to involve men in the conversation. Men are utilizing homosocial desire to police each other, to make sure they are watching and following men who embody the historical characteristics of masculinity (i.e. strong, tough, and stoic). Like the research literature, I find that all-male groups are important influences in the perpetuation of masculinity norms. Restructuring those groups to include men that introduce new conceptualization of roles, expectations, and values into these conversations can play a powerful role in shifting the social dynamics that are so influential for young men.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



To: Mindy Sue Engen
MAIN 219

From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Committee

Date: 03/14/2019

Action: **Exemption Granted**

Action Date: 03/14/2019

Protocol #: 1901171835

Study Title: A Goffmanesque Analysis of Masculine Ideas in Magazine Advertisements

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Guide

Thank for agreeing to be a part of the focus group on men's magazine advertising. I appreciate your willingness to participate. The reason for this group the how media images marketed to men resonate with men's wants, needs, and aspirations. Our project needs your input and we want you to share your honest and open thoughts and opinions with me.

Ground Rules:

1. We want you to do the talking. I want to hear from everyone in the group.
2. There are no right or wrong answers. Every person's experiences and opinions are important. I want to hear a wide range of opinions.
3. What is said in this room is kept confidential. I will be recording the conversation to make sure I capture everything that is said, but am not recording any identifying information in the transcripts. We will submit your name to your instructors to ensure you get participation credit. But no identifying information will be linked to your responses or contribution to the discussion.
4. By attending the focus group, you are consenting to participate in the conversation and allow your voice to be temporarily recorded. You are free to leave, refuse to speak, or decline to respond to any and all questions at any time during the focus group.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX C

Men's Focus Group Questions

1. I'm going to show you an image with some text. What do you notice when you view /read this? What things stand out to you?
 - What is the overall message?
 - What do you think the people who made it are trying to do?
2. How does this image/text make you feel (about yourself)? To what extent do you want to be/be like/be friends with the guy described in the photo and text?
 - What about the women in the photo?
3. In what ways are you similar/different from the person described/pictured here?
4. Do you think that most men want to be like this man?
 - How do you think women think about this man? What traits do women desire in a man? Other men?
 - Would you categorize this image as sexual? What aspects of the image make it sexual or make it not sexual? Does the image inspire any sexual feelings in you?
6. What does it mean to be "masculine" or "manly"? How/where/in what ways did you learn this?
 - Where/how did you learn this?
 - In what ways do you think others people agree with/disagree with you?
 - If you could be any kind of person/have any characteristics you wanted, what would they be?
 - In your opinion what makes an "ideal" man? Do you think most people/men/women would agree with you?
7. Do you think the expectations of men are different now than they used to be? How so?
 - Some have said that our social views about masculinity/what it means to be a man are changing. Do you agree that it is changing?
 - Do you think that is should? If so, how/in what ways?
 - Tell me about your male peers. In what ways do their impressions/opinions matter to you?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say about this image/text? About masculinity in general?

Participants Needed! Focus group on Men's Advertising

UA Researchers are studying how young people respond to and feel about advertisements for products marketed to men. We are looking for , age 18-34. Participants will view advertisements and talk about their interest and reactions.



Women's Focus Group

Date: April 25

Time: 5-6pm

Location: 210 Main

Men's Focus Group

Date: April 22 & 23rd

Time: 5-6pm

Location: 210 Main



RSVP to slc013@uark.edu to
reserve your spot
Snacks and refreshments provided

Investigators:

Shelby Clark

slc013@email.uark.edu

Mindy Bradley

mwbradli@uark.edu

Dept. of Sociology and
Criminology

This research has been
approved through UA :
IRB # [1800127282](#)