

The Representations Of Men Depicted In *Men's Health* Magazine

María del Mar Rubio-Hernández
Universidad de Sevilla
mdmar.rubio@gmail.com

Resumen: *Este artículo se centra en el análisis textual de la revista Men's Health y la representación que la publicación presenta de la masculinidad, haciendo especial hincapié en los anuncios que incluye en sus páginas. Estas imágenes constituyen, por un lado, una definición mediática de lo masculino, mientras, por otro, promueven una cultura de consumo en la sociedad estadounidense. Por lo tanto, dado su éxito y la influencia de las revistas de estilo masculinas en cuanto a nuevos modelos de identificación se refiere, parece que un estudio acerca de su concepción sobre la masculinidad y sus representaciones resulta necesario para conocer cómo ésta es entendida socialmente en nuestros días.*

Palabras clave: masculinidad, revistas de estilo masculinas, Men's Health

Abstract: *This article focuses on the analysis of the lifestyle magazine Men's Health and the representations of masculinity depicted in the publication, specifically in the advertisements within its pages. While those images constitute media accounts of maleness within American society, they are definitely oriented to promote a culture of consumption. Thus, given the popularity of this publication and the influence of lifestyle magazines in proposing new models in terms of identification, it seems that a study about their conception of masculinity and the way it is represented within their pages is determinant in order to understand how masculinity is socially conceived nowadays.*

Keywords: masculinity, lifestyle magazine, Men's Health

1. Introduction

This analysis is based upon a cultural-studies perspective which understands the text as a wider notion which includes films, images, photographs, advertisements, etc; in a few words, cultural studies focus on popular culture products, as well as on everyday meanings, as pointed out by Stuart Hall (1980). Within cultural studies, semiotics seeks to analyse media texts in terms of its latent, connotative meanings. In fact, the present study tries to determine the realities which are manifested in *Men's Health* magazine, as well as those which are suppressed. Another important notion within semiotics which is taken into account in this analysis is the active role of the reader; in this sense, meaning is not considered to be transmitted but actively created according to certain codes and conventions established within the community that the readers belong to (the encoding/decoding process as explained by Hall, 1980: 128-138).

The present article and its conclusions must be understood within the United States context, given the origins of the magazine which is analysed and the power of the American mass media in establishing social roles worldwide. However, given the impact of these exported culture products made in the USA on an increasingly globalized scenario, the ideas which are exposed here could be easily extrapolated to other western societies.

2. *Men's Health* within the men's lifestyle magazine market



Figure 1

When studying the depiction of men in printed advertising, the context constitutes a relevant element to take into account, since the magazine itself can be understood as the meaning-making framework which determines the way in which an image is interpreted (Eco, 1976). As Tim Edwards states, “men’s style magazines are cultural texts and, as such, any analysis of their significance in terms of masculinity is essentially an analysis of representation” (1997: 134). Therefore, the study of the magazine and its philosophy is the starting point in order to understand the representation of maleness proposed by this successful publication.

Some preconceived ideas and prejudices are usually linked to *Men's Health* and the way of life which is promoted within its pages. While the publication is tremendously successful among some who faithfully follow its advice, it is the object of criticism and

underrating from those who understand it as a stereotyped and superficial magazine. The said controversy that surrounds the monthly publication seems to be part of its contradictory nature, since, regardless of its clear orientation to health and fitness, *MH* is defined as a general information source for men.

2.1. Men's Health as a part of the health-oriented market

Men's Health is published by Rodale Inc. in Emmaus, Pennsylvania. Rodale Inc. is an American publisher company committed to health and wellness which publishes some of the most popular lifestyle magazines, such as *Men's Health*, *Prevention*, *Bicycling*, or *Runner's World* as well as some acclaimed books about health and fitness. Furthermore, two more publications oriented to women and parents, complete the triad of this publishing empire: *Woman's Health* and *Children's Health*. Although those are not the only launchings (from 2004 they have spun off *Best Life*, *Men's Health Living*, and the *Belly Off! Diet* book, based on the columns about weight loss testimonials included in every issue of the magazine), the fact of diversifying their contents as well as orienting them to the different targets within family members talks about their commitment with health in social terms. In fact, in 2007, *MH* promoted an initiative to combat childhood obesity called *FitSchools*. Some health, fitness, and nutrition experts are sent to several schools around the country each year in order to remake their physical education programs and lunch offerings, as shown in an article published in each issue. In addition, they also created *The FitSchools Foundation*, a nonprofit organization aimed to help end childhood obesity and get children interested in healthy and active lives in the USA. Therefore, it can be said that *MH* is not an isolated product focused on fitness, but it constitutes a part of a whole brand concerned with health, which participates in a wider social trend, increasingly sensitive to wellbeing. In this sense, Belinda Wheaton states that "the male body project underlined by Men's Health sees the body as a 'passport for the good life'" (2003: 208). According to her point of view, every section is oriented to improve the body in its different aspects from a wellbeing condition, as a way to reach a better quality of life (in fact, the stress in exercise and health is illustrated in the cover of every issue, as showed in figure 1). The magazine performs, consequently, as a reliable doctor who gives useful advice to a trusting reader; "the magazine can be trusted (like a good doctor) not to mislead the reader" (Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks, 2001: 120). In fact, the *MH Experts Advisors* section provides the readers with the possibility of asking the doctors from different specialities (i.e. cardiology, dentistry, dermatology, exercise science, mental health, neurology, nutrition, sports medicine, weight loss).

Given this, we should consider the growing awareness of healthy habits within American society as one of the potential reasons that explains the success of *MH*. Not only is the popularity of the magazine visible when checking out its selling figures, with a monthly circulation of 1.85 million, but it is also evident when considering the number of international editions worldwide (more than 40). Moreover, according to the statistics, it is the biggest-selling men's magazine today. Some online newspapers, such as the *Press Gazette*, report the success of *MH* in battling the recession that is affecting the industry of the magazines. Today it is said to be "the top selling paid-for

men's lifestyle magazine in the first half of this year"¹. The British newspaper *The Guardian* also points out these results: "National Magazine Rodale's joint venture, Men's Health, recorded its 15th consecutive year-on-year increase – up 2.1% – to overtake Bauer Media's FHM to become the biggest-selling men's magazine in the first half of 2009, according to Audit Bureau of Circulations figures"².

Therefore, it seems necessary to argue about the ways in which *Men's Health's* influential conception about men is changing the social representations of masculinity.

2.2. Men's Health; a lifestyle magazine by definition

Despite its clear orientation towards health and wellbeing, *Men's Health* is, according to its editors, a lifestyle magazine, and in every issue, they make sure to show its readers from the first pages that the publication is not just limited to healthy questions, but it includes more topics concerning men. The 'lifestyle' notion refers to the magazines which can be included under the 'general interest-magazines-for-men' label. This 'lifestyle' term was conceived as a marketing strategy to grab men's attention, since the magazines, which were not 'lifestyle' in the past, were purposively targeted this way in order to gain the interest of the male audience as consumers at the beginning of the last century (Edwards, 1997). Nowadays, the men's lifestyle magazines industry, according to Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks, is the most growing segment within the magazine market (2003: 118). The expansion experienced by the sector during the 1990's caused the diversification of the men's interest magazines, which has segmented into specialist topics or niche markets over the years. This way, *Men's Health* is the most outstanding example of the health-oriented magazines sector, with more titles such as *Men's fitness*. Edwards explains the rise of men's magazines in mentioning some factors, such as economic and demographic developments, the influence of sexual political movements like feminism, and "the acceptance of consumption itself as part of masculinity in identity and

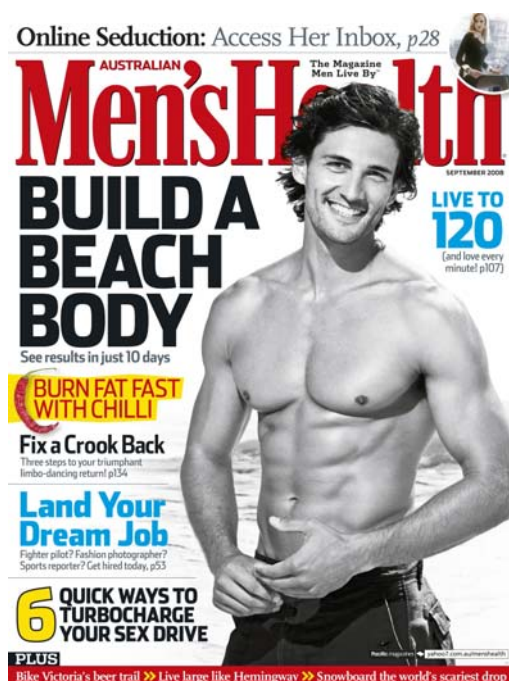


Figure 2

¹ Ponsford, Dominic (August 13, 2009), "Mag ABCs: Men's Health goes top of men's sector", Press Gazette, retrieved November 15, 2010, from

www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=44137&c=1

² Brook, Stephen (August 13, 2009), "Men's magazines and women's glossies share the pain of recession. OK!, Men's Health and specialist titles among the few to increase circulation in men's and women's markets", *Guardian.co.uk*, retrieved November 15, 2010, from

www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/aug/13/magazine-abcs-mens-womens

activity" (1997: 84).

Curiously, *MH* hasn't always been presented like this. When it was first launched in 1987, *Men's Health* was conceived as a health-oriented annual publication; however it has evolved into a lifestyle magazine, including issues such as fitness, nutrition, relationships, finances, health, travel and fashion. In fact, some authors point out that "magazines like Men's Health encourage men to be more 'open' about themselves (to talk about their feelings, for example), while bringing into the open certain (previously repressed) aspects of masculinity including more public discussion of men's relationships, fashion and health" (Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks, 2003: 126). The change of perspective took place in 2000, due to a decline of the sales figures that the magazine experienced after a spectacular growth during the 1990's. In consequence, the new editor in chief –David Zinczenko – took some measures that implied a shift from a health format to a lifestyle product, including sections about cars, finances and more issues about fashion and relationships. Zinczenko makes emphasis on this aspect when defining the main features of the magazine in an interview; "This is just a lifestyle approach, this is very important for this magazine. It's to show a lifestyle. Here is a guy celebrating life, who is living all life, who's in control..." [...] What we try to do is really look at all the things in a man's life that he might wanna have fixed or addressed in order to be a complete man. If it matters to a man, then it is gonna be in our pages"³. According to this view, *MH* is understood as a complete source men can turn to when looking for advice or for information.

In fact, the magazine is defined just like this on the Rodale Inc. Website (the publisher company):

Men's Health is the #1 source worldwide of information for and about men. It's the brand for active, successful, professional men who want greater control over their physical, mental, and emotional lives. *Men's Health* gives men the tools they need to make their lives better, through in-depth reporting covering everything from fashion and grooming to health and nutrition as well as cutting-edge gear, the latest entertainment, timely features, and more⁴

In this presentation, the magazine defines its reader's profile, by stressing the content it offers as a diverse, intense and useful entertainment. In conclusion, it is clear that *Men's Health* places itself as a source of information for men within the magazine market and that's how the magazine constructs its identity which is reflected in its communication strategy.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the content of the magazine is not limited to exclusively health issues since it contains more topics presented in five main sections: health, nutrition, fitness, guy knowledge, and sex & relationships, it is clear that all of them are oriented towards reaching a healthy and fit body. The topics, hence, are shaped by a perspective focused on fitness and health as the main goals to be reached; in other words, they stand as the basis of the philosophy they endorse. Given this, it seems that the ultimate aspiration is to reach the body of the models that

³ Interview with David Zinczenko of Men's Health, by Lauren Touby, correspondent of NY 360°, retrieved November 14, 2010, from www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtvYNc62zGs&feature=player_embedded

⁴ Retrieved November 14, 2010, from www.rodaleinc.com/brand/mens-health

appear in the covers, as seen in figure 2. But not only is health sponsored by *MH*, but other values such as consumption and luxury are highly promoted as well. As mentioned before, the magazine is oriented to specific readers who are targeted as new consumers. Thus, advertising plays an important part in the magazine industry by proposing diverse male categories and, consequently, offering the means – products– to reach those identities.

3. The role of advertising in shaping masculinity

The involvement of advertising in the magazine industry started in the 1890's when the decrease of the price allowed the announcers to bear the costs of the edition, turning out to be the main source of profit from that moment on. The main consequence then was an incredible increase in the number of readers. Nevertheless, the role of advertising inside the magazine industry, as well as in the rest of the media, crosses financial boundaries, since its presence in a specific publication contributes to the publishing company's personality. In addition, its importance as a social discourse is shown by its influence in promoting new models and perpetuating specific identities. As Christopher Lasch says, "advertisement serves not so much to advertise products as to promote consumption as a way of life. It educates the masses into an unappeasable appetite not only for goods but for new experiences and personal fulfilment" (1991: 2).

This way, the wide catalogue of goods presented in the magazine –including products such as fashion apparel, accessories, beer, technology, nutritious food, cologne, etc.– can be understood as a way in which the reader is provided with a variety of goods that help him to perform effectively in society by expressing his identity in physical terms. Thus, in this context, men are understood as consumers whose maleness can be emphasized by the purchase of certain products. In Edwards' opinion, the main goal of these magazines is to encourage and perpetuate "high spending" (1997: 74). Consequently, advertisements perform as the perfect complement for the philosophy proposed by the magazine; while men are encouraged to work in private, they are expected to show the results of the time and money invested in their appearance in public. In Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks' words, "men are encouraged to 'work the body' (in private) in order to be able to succeed in the (public) world of relationships and work" (2001: 96). Therefore, the acquisition of certain products such as cologne, jeans or cars, helps them to improve and stress their anatomy –as the embodiment of their commitment to health and fitness– by adding status, sophistication and style. This aspect highlights the importance of the consumption culture in shaping the representations of masculinity portrayed in magazines. Thus, as Edwards proposes, "it is perhaps more accurate to see men's style magazines primarily as vehicles for a new 'all-consuming' form of masculinity, encouraging men to spend time and money on developing consumer-oriented attitudes and practices from shopping to leisure activities: in short, a narcissistic and particularly introspective set of primarily auto-erotic pleasures" (1997: 82).

According to his account, and from a marketing perspective, it could be said that the diversity of male categories presented in men's lifestyle magazines is a mere pretext for launching products and services to be consumed by different male publics. The several models of masculinities that are suggested in the magazines, thus, can be

understood as niche markets that have to be fulfilled in order to diversify the offer and to orient it to specific individuals. How are those models represented in *Men's Health*?

4. The representation of masculinity in *Men's Health*

One of the most characteristic features of *Men's Health* is the reiterated exposure of the male anatomy, since it is openly exposed to the readers from front page to the back cover in order to be observed, admired, and consumed. This way, the body is treated in multiple ways, suggesting different male identities which present two main aspects in common; the cult of the athletic body in one hand and the acquisition of certain products to improve its appearance in the other hand. Taking this into account, the ways in which maleness is represented in *MH* are explained next through the metaphor of the bodies, due to the importance given to the male anatomy in the publication.

4.1. Consumer bodies

Given what has been mentioned before, it is not strange that most experts in the field highlight the connection between the concepts of masculinity depicted in the magazines and the construction of men as consumers. In Benwell's words, "the evolution of masculinity in the magazine context is so intimately bound up with the workings of consumer capitalism and its needs to refresh the market once a product becomes 'stale'" (2003: 26). Thus, it could be said that the renewals concerning what is understood as manly are subject to the constant changes taking place not only within fashion industry, but also within the whole market.

In this sense, it is essential to note that, as a concept, the term masculinity is not fixed nor natural, but rather socially constructed, multiple, and, consequently, different depending on the culture, time and place, as Beynon claims in *Masculinities and Culture* (2002); a notion that Osgerby also points out: "masculinity' is a multiform, mobile and historically variable construction" (2003: 61). Therefore, from this point of view, the formulations and reformulations of maleness through time respond to a strategy to attract men as new purchasers. This new conception of men as consumers developed during the first half of the 20th century in the United States, where the roots of the current male lifestyle magazines are traced. "The

magazines that define masculinity today do so in terms that were initiated in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The masculine norms within which we live today are closely



Figure 3

related to those that emerged in relation to the rise of consumer culture early in the century” (Pendergast, 2000: 267). In that moment, men were proposed a new role as consumers, which was an exclusive female issue at that time –“consumer practice developed as a pre-eminently feminine province” (Osgerby, 2003: 59) – since men had always been connected to the productive sphere.

Thus, a new discourse had to be constructed in order to shape men as purchasers, and that is what social discourses such as fashion trends and magazines proposed in the beginning of the century. As it happens nowadays, that construction was strongly connected with the prosperous economical context of that period in the American society, when a promising interest in consumption was emerging within the wealthy male population. This is the idea presented by Osgerby, who explains:

Consumption-oriented models of American masculinity, then, did not suddenly materialize in the late 20th century. Instead, there exists a much longer history of masculine identities formed around stylistic display and the pleasures of consumerism. His roots lying in the consumer society that arose in the late 19th century, the style-conscious, male consumer was given greater cultural definition and legitimacy during the 1920s as he always steadily codified and courted by the institutions of the expanding commercial market. Ironically, though, it was during the 1930s –a decade that saw the most severe economic depression in American history –that the ‘consuming male’ took fuller form (2003: 65).

In much the same way that the man from the turn of the 20th century was taught to develop a new profile, traditionally exclusive to the feminine realm until then, today’s men are encouraged to be active consumers; they are, actually, an especially profitable target. An illustrative example of this trend is men’s increasing interest in fashion and personal products, as proved in a research conducted by Euromonitor International which shows that “the global market for male grooming products grew by an impressive average annual rate of 5.7% between 1997-2005”⁵. Thus, in order to create this interest in consumption, men began to be represented from a new perspective, slightly distant from the traditional depictions that were seen in the past. The images that started to appear in the magazines were not an isolated phenomenon, but a response to a new social reality, interrelated to the rest of depictions of men appearing in the media, as it happens today.

This way, the representation of men in this particular magazine is, in most cases, linked to the consumption of a specific product, since the models are depicted while consuming a product/service or enjoying it, as seen in figure 3. The presence of advertising is essential in *Men’s Health* due to the high percentage of pages devoted to the promotion of goods, over the general contents. As a matter of fact, this is a clearly visible aspect when perusing the publication, given the number of ads that can be found. Moreover, the catalogue of products responds to a strategy oriented to an upper class client.

⁵ Euromonitor Archive (November 3, 2006), “Metrosexuality – the male shopping giant awakes”, retrieved November 17, 2010, from:

www.euromonitor.com/Metrosexuality_the_male_shopping_giant_awakes

4.2. Instrumental bodies

Given the way of life promoted by *MH*, and its emphasis in highlighting the anatomy, we could say that it participates from the social discourse which endorses the importance of values linked to external beauty. According to some authors, we are immersed in a narcissistic culture that, in Belén López's words, "connects with a compulsive need for beauty which is linked to power and success" (2005: 180). Nowadays, a perfect body is synonymous with accomplishment and control within society, and the mass media constructs discourses where attractive celebrities are the contemporary glorified gods. This way, it is easy to understand that the imposed necessity for sculptural anatomies and attractive bodies is the driving force of an increasing industry of products oriented to slow the aging process and to remove excessive weight. The advertisements, thus, "are characterized by a reiterated praise of the corporal perfection, a perfection which is assumed as a social obligation nowadays" (Rey, 1993: 101). In this sense, Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks underline the conception of the physical appearance as a new way of responsibility within society: "within a consumer culture, the body is increasingly experienced as the responsibility of individuals" (1998: 91). According to this, the fact of having a fit body shows the external consequence of self-discipline, effort, and commitment; in this sense, the magazine urges its readers to "Get this body!" as seen in the exclamations of most of its covers (figure 4).

The body, therefore, is established as one of the last spaces that remains under our control, in opposition with the insecurities related to the future or the workplace. That is the thesis presented by Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks who make a parallelism between the uncertainty that men have to face in their workplace and the decline of their body, which they are encouraged to look after. As the authors explain, the body is the "new place of social discipline" (1998: 94), which seems to offer a reward in exchange for the effort that is invested in it, unlike the situation in their workplace. So, the body is understood as a new source of security and confidence. However, when paying attention to the philosophy which seems to be under the



Figure 4

values promoted by the magazine, one could find a controversy, since, on the one hand, *MH* encourages men to improve their healthy habits by establishing discipline in their lives; but on the other hand, it contributes to creating anxieties about their body in terms of age, strength, sexual performance and weight maintenance. In this sense, *MH* is another expression of the social fixation on physical appearance, which tries to impose its standards of beauty on the population. Moreover, it also reflects the uncertainty and fear of today's hypermodernistic society (Lipovetsky and Charles, 2006). Belinda Wheaton points out this idea when saying that the philosophy of *Men's*

Health is “a narcissistic culture which reinforces body anxieties” (2003: 208).

In any case, *MH* presents an instrumental relationship to the body, which is represented as a machine that should be refuelled in the least possible time in order to perform in an effective way. Furthermore, the articles provide technical explanations and scientific accounts of the exercises and instructions to follow in order to reach the best results; to beat one’s record, to be faster, better, stronger, fitter... to embody the features showed in the models and the discipline which they promote. The vocabulary linked to sport, the scientific jargon and the technical medical terms proves what Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks point out. According to their study, *Men’s Health* “is much more concerned with technical detail. In this respect, there is a clear division between the ‘expert’ status of the magazine and the person in need of advice (the ‘reader’)” (2003: 120). Therefore, the magazine itself can be understood as an illustration of the importance of the scientific discourse within our society, which still constitutes one of the privileged narratives nowadays (e.g. it performs as a legitimate source in advertising, since certain commercials of moisturizers or cars base their arguments on the benefits provided by the goods, scientifically tested and proved).

4.3. Objectified bodies

According to some specialists on men’s lifestyle magazines, not only is the male body instrumentalized, it is also objectified and exposed to the reader’s gaze. “Men are increasingly and unapologetically objectified, both in terms of erotic spectacle and as targets of advertising for products beyond cars and beer, including many items once thought to be marketed for women alone” (MacKinnon, 2003: 99). For a long time, women have been constructed as sexual objects for the male audience, being the focus of the public gaze in the social context. Nonetheless, men have also received the same treatment in the media since their inclusion in the consumption arena, as seen in an increasing number of ads (figure 5). Once man was conceived as a consumer, he was also represented in terms of his physical appearance, since a new discourse had to be created in order to reinforce his new role within society. As Edwards states, the new image of men has been homogeneously portrayed in different mass media; “the sexual objectification of men has increased in the media, in terms of film, drama and soap-opera sex appeal, where the importance of Hollywood is particularly apparent, and also in the recent phenomenon of male strippers and pornography for women” (1997: 5).

As a consequence, new concepts of masculinity have also been socially constructed and depicted. Some of them draw attention to the feminine side of men whose practices and appearance move away from the traditional manly image; for that reason, it is not strange that the term “metrosexuality” is the most often used when talking about the new depictions within men’s magazines since it refers to a man who is extremely aware of his physical appearance and is devoted to it by buying cosmetic and fashion products. Metrosexuality was firstly defined by Mark Simpson in an article called “Here come the mirror men” (1994). He offers a profile of the metrosexual male, describing him as a young man, who lives or works in urban spaces and has a high income. Simpson also defines some of his features, such as vanity, narcissism, attention to his appearance and self-care, which are materialized

in the purchase and use of high fashion clothes, accessories and cosmetics⁶. Therefore, it seems that the portrayal of men depicted in the publication fits within the idea and that it could be understood as a product oriented to metrosexual readers.

Nevertheless, being limited to this notion would be a myopic approach when considering the myriad of possibilities of the representation of masculinity. In fact, new genealogies of masculinities such as the *New man* and the *New lad* (Rosalinda Gill, 2003: 34-56) are introduced. Benwell (2003) describes these two male models firstly projected by the British publications *GQ* and *Loaded*. Whereas the “new man” is defined as sensitive, strong, provider that embraces feminism, the “new lad” is perceived as a direct reaction to the former, since it makes emphasis on the values which have been traditional linked to maleness, like their interest in cars, alcohol, sport, and women. In any case, the common factor among these proposals concerning masculinities is the relevance of consumption as a way of shaping men as active participants in a customer culture and the new treatment of the male anatomy within the media in order to reach the said purpose.

4.4. Homogeneous bodies

Despite the diversity in providing men with different models, *MH* seems to belong to the mainstream discourse which portrays the dominant depictions of maleness in physical terms, linked to power, strength, and youth. The representation of men in the magazine can be analyzed in three different aspects: his physical appearance, his external look (in terms of style), and his lifestyle (values). In general terms, he is profiled as a young white middle-class man, physically well-built, and sexually attractive. Concerning his external look, he wears fashionable clothing, presents a modern hairstyle, and carries trendy complements, which make him look elegant and tasteful (as seen in figure 6). Finally, these features are the external expression of a healthy, sporty, and successful lifestyle. In a few words, they are the materialization of the man projected by *Men's Health*; a hyperbole of the magazine's proposal.

Edwards points out this idea when saying: “the content of these representations remains extraordinarily fixed. The men concerned are always young, usually white, particularly muscular, critically strong-jawed, clean shaven (often all over), healthy, sporty, successful, virile, and ultimately sexy” (1997: 41). The author also emphasizes the absences, so to speak, of the men who are never represented in the media since

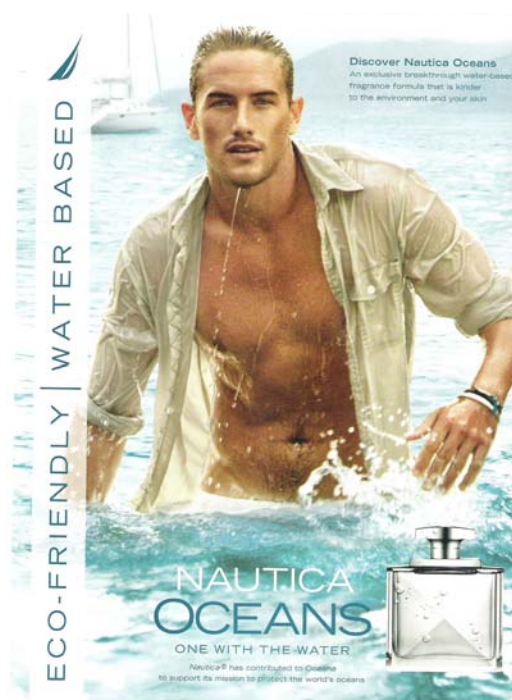


Figure 5

⁶ Simpson, Mark (2006), “Here come the mirror men”, retrieved November 15, 2010, from www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html

they don't fit within the standards of attractiveness, wealth, and fitness: "whilst other images of masculinity do necessarily exist, they are not used to advertise men's fashion and accessories or to sell anything other than their silliness: dodderly old men, screaming queens and ghetto-blasting black guys" (1997: 41). Therefore, in this construction of masculinity displayed within men's magazines, there are hegemonic images that are repeatedly represented while others are subordinated, mainly in relation to questions of age, color, sexual orientation, and weight. The latter do not present the socially accepted body nor the requirements to be a purchaser and thus, they are not allowed to participate in the consumption world proposed by men's magazines. In conclusion,

Whilst the white, young, trim and good-looking man with plenty of income and the means to spend It has much to gain from the pleasures and passions of the expansion of fashion in tandem with consumer society, the older, less affluent, less fit or more rurally located man faces an increasing onslaught of negative comments and criticism for his failure to live up to an ideal type. Consumer society may well open up opportunities for some, yet it slams doors in the faces of others (Edwards, 1997: 130).

Regarding this aspect, homosexuality is an especially controversial issue, since it is also absent from the discourse offered by *MH*. This way, it could be said that the images of men depicted in the magazine, which is oriented to a heterosexual target, exclusively represent heterosexual men. However, these representations are sometimes closer to feminine poses and attitudes, as mentioned before, since the models are exposed as objects to be observed. This is the reason why many readers present a contradictory response when being openly exposed to the images of attractive men in a theoretically heterosexual magazine. Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks talk about the way that magazines resolve that problem in offering a traditional masculine discourse in the rest of the content: "while the magazines are dominated by images of conventionally 'sexy' young women, their pages also provide readers with a publicly acceptable way of looking at images of beautiful young men without the stigma that attaches to reading or viewing more explicitly homoerotic images" (2003: 126). As a matter of fact, *MH* proposes a



Figure 6

notion of masculinity which is focused on anatomy, stressing male physical features, as to ensure the heterosexuality of its readers, who, at the same time, are ironically provided with suggestive images of men, sexually objectified as women.

5. Conclusions

Men's Health, which is the best-selling publication within the men's lifestyle magazine industry, presents some similarities with other magazines concerning the representation of men, although it also has some peculiarities which make it unique and worthy as a focus of inquiry. On the one hand, it portrays different visions of masculinity (i.e. new man, new lad, metrosexual), as the rest of men's publications and that is, according to the experts, one of the reasons for the popularity of the magazines since they offer countless possibilities for contemporary men in questions of identification. In fact, this feature connects the men's magazines as a text with the rest of the media and social discourses in terms of intertextuality, since nowadays men are provided with a lot of possibilities "to express male identity in American culture" (Pendergast, 2000: 1).

It was not always like this, though. The social construction of these identities during the last century seems to respond to questions of marketing, given that a new discourse was needed in order to attract men's attention to be new consumers. In this sense, magazines and advertisements played an important role in shaping a new concept of masculinity and providing the male target with new models. That's why, according to Benwell (2003), the study of magazines can be a window to understand the notion of masculinity in a specific moment since it reports the concerns of the society where it is born. Therefore, another main feature of *Men's Health* and the images of men depicted on its pages is its consumer-oriented nature. Not only are men provided with different roles, but they are also offered a wide catalogue of products and goods in order to identify themselves with the model and express, socially, this said masculinity. Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks go further in this sense, by defining the magazines as "sources of cultural power in respect of the speed at which network capitalism stimulates new markets and helps inform the changing definition of contemporary masculinity" (2003: 129).

Nonetheless, the plurality of masculinities depicted is not a synonym of diversity in terms of portraying the average man. On the contrary, the images that are found in the *Men's Health's* pages, as well as in the rest of magazines, offer a homogeneous idealized portrayal of man, who fits within the standard canons of beauty imposed by the dominant social discourses. In this sense, there are some absences concerning the subordinated male groups who are never depicted in magazines, and therefore, are excluded as a target from the consumer discourse.

But if something makes *Men's Health* different from the rest of magazines and better defines its philosophy, is its orientation towards health and fitness. The magazine performs as a doctor who offers reliable advice, based on scientific and technical support. Moreover, the body is understood as one of the places that still remains under male control. This way, *MH* presents an instrumentalized conception of the body, since it's depicted as a machine that can be improved to perform better, faster and longer. The body, therefore, is a construction oriented to express the discipline and effort –financial effort sometimes– invested on it in public while the physical appearance turns out to be an important feature socially, and it is expressed like this in the rest of the mass media discourses. In this sense, the products suggested by the advertisements become the perfect visual complement to a healthy body, in order to show, externally, a specific identity.

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