



Depiction of masculinity in print advertising in vogue magazine

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Abstract

This research paper explores the depiction of masculinity in print advertisements featured in Vogue magazine, focusing on parameters such as diversity, body positivity, hyper-masculinity, and the breaking of stereotypes. By examining a representative sample of advertisements over a specified period, this study aims to understand how modern masculinity is portrayed in one of the world's leading fashion publications. The findings reveal a complex landscape where traditional notions of hyper-masculinity often coexist with emerging themes of inclusivity and body positivity. While some advertisements continue to reinforce conventional masculine ideals – emphasizing physical strength, dominance, and traditional gender roles—others challenge these norms by featuring a more diverse range of male models in terms of race, body type, and gender expression. The study highlights significant progress in the portrayal of masculinity, with a noticeable increase in ads that celebrate body positivity and break away from stereotypical representations. However, it also underscores the ongoing challenges and inconsistencies in fully embracing a more inclusive and holistic depiction of masculinity in fashion advertising. This analysis contributes to the broader discourse, suggesting that while strides have been made, there is still considerable room for improvement in achieving a balanced and progressive portrayal of masculinity.

Keywords: Masculinity, Diversity, Body-Positivity, Hyper-masculinity, Breaking Stereotypes.

Introduction

The contemporary conception of masculinity emphasizes qualities such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and nurturing characteristics as fundamental elements. According to Frith and Gleeson (2004) ^[4], research suggests that cultural shifts in how men's bodies are represented make men increasingly dissatisfied with their appearance. This paradigm shift is important in challenging conventional stereotypes and advancing a more inclusive and empathetic society. Encouraging men to openly express their emotions, fostering a culture of empathy, and establishing secure environments for vulnerability emerge as pivotal strategies in redefining masculinity in a positive light.

Advertisements have drastically changed over the years concerning the social roles of men and women. Traditional gender roles were heavily reinforced in the past, women were often portrayed as homemakers, caregivers, and objects of male desire, while men were portrayed as strong, dominant, and in control. However, to keep up with societal norms and cultural shifts, the advertising industry must adapt.

Masculinity is shown in its diverse range and spectrum such as empathy, vulnerability, and emotional intelligence. Hateful tropes such as the "alpha male" archetype have created negative stereotypes about men and advertisers must keep this in check and be mindful. Representation of men in advertising can affect how they are also perceived and treated in society, as well as on consumer behavior.

The types of masculinity we see today are very different in a world where the size of muscles, bank balance and vehicle seem to define a form of masculinity. Elegant and stylish men are considered gentlemen. There is a sense of dressing style where men are characterized as Classic and Modern Masculinity.

The pervasive influence of advertising inundates us with a curated vision of an idyllic life, often positioning specific products as the gateway to achieving that life (Bassett, 2009) ^[2]. Through these advertisements, a social construct is established where certain products are attributed with characteristics deemed "masculine" or "feminine". This occurs because advertising often communicates that the products we consume are an extension of our identities.

MacKinnon (2003) ^[7] highlights that men are shown as being in a dominant position, not smiling or interacting with others, in fashion advertising, which tends to lean towards the feminine in industry categories. Their complete faces may be fixed on the viewer or the advertised goods, but they hardly ever look at anyone else in the setting. Despite falling into the advertising group, his masculinity has not diminished due to his avoidance of relationships.

In the findings of Frith and Gleeson (2004) ^[4], they stated that men frequently express a desire to appear stylish and to wear clothing that enhances their physique. They demonstrate skill in presenting themselves well and understanding which fashion styles suit their specific body shapes. This expertise in self-presentation shows that men are increasingly conscious of how they look and seek clothes that not only fit comfortably but also flatter their appearance. By paying attention to these details, men are able to confidently choose outfits that align with their personal style preferences and enhance their overall image.

Wood (1994) ^[14] mentioned that the media often portrays women and men according to stereotypes, which can influence how relationships between them are depicted. These stereotypes depict women as nurturing, emotional, and often in need of protection, while men are portrayed as strong, assertive, and dominant. These portrayals shape the way relationships are shown in media, often reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations. For example,

women may be depicted as dependent on men for emotional support or decision-making, while men are shown as the providers or leaders in relationships. These stereotypes in media can affect societal perceptions and expectations of how relationships should function, potentially limiting the diversity and complexity of real-life relationships between women and men.

Landing on the cover of American Vogue is a dream for many models, but it's rare for men (Lamb, 2016) ^[6]. American Vogue, known as a women's magazine, has featured women on its covers since it began in 1892. Only six men have graced the cover, starting with actor Richard Gere in 1992 and most recently in February 2016. Gere appeared with his then-wife Cindy Crawford, one of the two real-life couples to feature on the cover. Another notable couple was Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, whose cover sparked controversy due to Kardashian's fame. Another celebrated cover featured basketball star LeBron James with model Gisele Bündchen in April 2008. These rare male covers on American Vogue highlight special moments in the magazine's history, often capturing public attention and discussion.

Over time, media portrayals of gender have evolved from reinforcing rigid stereotypes – like women as submissive homemakers and men as dominant breadwinners – to embracing more diverse and inclusive depictions (More, 2023) ^[9]. Today, there's a greater awareness of gender diversity, prompting media to move away from simplistic roles towards more realistic representations. This shift reflects a broader societal movement towards challenging traditional norms, promoting equality, and celebrating the richness of all gender identities in advertising and media.

Muldrow (2018) ^[11] argues that in a society men are more open to objectifying male images because they find the images rewarding and it is believed to help reinforce traditional male roles. Muldrow says "Media around the world have disdained advertisers, such as Dolce & Gabbana ("Dolce & Gabbana under fire," 2015), an advertiser that showed a shirtless, muscular male holding down a female in a "gang rape" scene, an advertisement that both objectifies men and displays the masculine tenet of violence" (p.1).

Scheibling (2014) ^[13] highlighted that advertisements blend text and images to convey diverse messages: text provides specific details and calls to action, while images evoke emotions, associations, and cultural symbolism. Together, they create compelling narratives that inform and persuade, influencing consumer behavior through nuanced interpretations tailored to individual and cultural perspectives. This versatile approach enables ads to effectively capture attention, resonate with diverse audiences, and achieve marketing objectives by presenting products and services in engaging ways.

The world is evolving and it is important to recognize that women are now taking a diverse change in leadership roles and the workforce, not just as caretakers but as executives (Heathy, 2020) ^[5]. Despite this progress, advertisements often continue to perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, depicting women as weak, dependent, and primarily valued for their physical appearance. Meanwhile, men are frequently portrayed as strong and capable individuals. The paper explores and identifies the gender stereotypes prevalent in advertising today.

In the findings of Morris (2006) ^[10], she highlighted that Media, including advertisements, often portray ideals of

masculinity and femininity that may not reflect real-life behavior but strongly influence how we believe we should behave and how others should look and act. These images create standards that shape our self-perception and guide our behavior. They also reflect and reinforce cultural values, often positioning women in subordinate roles compared to men. Thus, media representations play a significant role in shaping societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles and behaviors.

The fashion industry has traditionally focused on showcasing muscular men with perfect figures and often emphasizes men with beards (Barry, 2014) ^[11]. Unfortunately, this has meant that models of diverse sizes were often left out of advertising because they were thought not to appeal to consumers. Recently, there has been a noticeable movement towards inclusivity and diversity within the advertising industry. This shift is making a big impact by promoting body positivity and self-acceptance. It's challenging previous norms by including a wider range of body types and appearances in fashion campaigns. This change aims to celebrate the diversity of people's bodies and to encourage everyone to feel comfortable and confident in their own skin.

Ruiz (2015) ^[12] suggested that, In the fashion industry, especially in products like beauty and style merchandise, there has been a focus on catering to a masculine market. This has led to a trend where male figures are often objectified in advertising campaigns, particularly in the male fragrance industry. Commercials for men's cologne often feature a young, attractive man who embodies traditional notions of masculinity in a very stylish way. These ads emphasize physical appearance, grooming, and a fashionable lifestyle, aiming to appeal to consumers by presenting an idealized image of masculinity. This approach not only promotes products but also reinforces societal ideas about what it means to be a desirable and fashionable man, influencing perceptions and consumer behaviors.

A clear trend across these studies is the gradual transition from rigid, hyper-masculine portrayals to a more fluid and diverse representation of masculinity. While advertisements historically emphasized dominance and physical strength, contemporary trends reflect growing inclusivity, highlighting men's emotional depth, style, and self-awareness. However, objectification persists, particularly in fashion and beauty advertising, where male figures are often idealized and linked to consumerist aspirations.

The primary aim of this research is to examine how masculinity is represented in print advertisements, particularly those related to fashion and beauty products. This investigation will involve identifying and classifying the various stereotypes that are commonly associated with masculinity. Additionally, the study seeks to analyze the evolution of masculinity's portrayal in Vogue Magazine over the period from 2015 to 2023, highlighting any significant changes or trends that may have emerged during this timeframe.

Vogue, an American magazine, designed by Arthur Baldwin Turnure, focused on local social events and fashion and had its first issue released in the December of 1892. After Conde Montrose Nast purchased Vogue in 1909, the magazine changed its focus to a women's magazine, focusing on local news rather than social graces and fashion.

Vogue magazine, one of the first to include a color cover, has made a significant impact in the publishing industry by

promoting diversity and inclusivity. It features top-tier illustrators and photographers, ensuring the highest quality content for its readers. Vogue's print ads feature men from diverse ethnicities, backgrounds, and styles, reflecting the magazine's diverse readership's tastes and interests. The magazine's global reach and impact in the fashion world add to its appeal. It also emphasizes striking a balance between beauty and fashion, recognizing women's lives and their identities. Luxury fashion houses like Dior, Gucci, Chanel, Prada, and Louis Vuitton collaborate with both genders to assert their prominence in the industry.

Methodology

This research was conducted using the Content Analysis Method. The relevant data was collected from Vogue magazines, carefully selecting male and female advertisements representing masculinity. With a specific focus on the period from 2015 to 2023, randomly chose two issues from each year to observe any potential changes over this timeframe thoroughly. The advertisements reviewed were specifically related to fashion and beauty.

This research study gathered data from a carefully curated sample of 49 advertisements sourced from a diverse range of 18 magazines. The advertisements chosen for analysis were specifically centered around beauty and fashion, catering to both male and female audiences. By meticulously handpicking these 49 ads, we aimed to capture a comprehensive cross-section of advertising content within the 18 magazines under study.

Analysis and Findings

Two issues per year were chosen randomly for the study. The chosen issues are given below in the Table 1.

Table 1: List of issues of Vogue chosen for study.

YEAR	ISSUE	ADS
2015	August	1
2015	October	5
2016	March	6
2016	November	11
2017	July	2
2017	October	8
2018	August	4
2018	December	2
2019	January	1
2019	Febuary	2
2020	January	1
2020	March	1
2021	March	1
2021	December	3
2022	August	-
2022	November	-
2023	March	-
2023	January	1
	Total	49

The table above displays the total number of magazines and issues that were randomly selected from specific years. These issues contain advertisements featuring both male and female models, representing traits associated with masculinity. There are a total of 49 ads which will be analyzed using four specific parameters: diversity, hyper-masculinity, body-positivity, and breaking stereotype. In these forty-nine advertisements sampled, there are thirty-five brands. In the fashion and clothing category there are

twenty-one ads and nine ads of accessories. In the cosmetics category there are nineteen ads. Among the beauty products perfumes/colognes had the highest number of ads with sixteen.

Lehengas and Sherwanis

The positioning of men within a group of women in advertisements often symbolises their role in supporting and protecting women. These ads promote gender diversity by featuring both men and women, with men standing confidently and poised, representing positive masculinity. They challenge stereotypes in two ways: first, by depicting men in high-fashion bridal advertisements, marking a significant shift in societal norms, and second, by portraying men in ways that deviate from traditional hyper-masculine traits. However, the serious expressions of male models in some ads might unintentionally suggest a lack of interest in fashion.

The coordination of men's attire with women's conveys a sense of harmony and balance in gender representation. It also emphasises men's role in complementing and supporting cultural and familial settings, reinforcing gender diversity. Many of these ads prioritise sophistication, elegance, and cultural refinement over aggression and dominance. While they do not explicitly challenge stereotypes, they move away from the conventional portrayal of masculinity as serious, aggressive, or dominant. However, one limitation is the lack of diversity in body types, as most models conform to a standard physique. Despite this, the ads contribute to a positive and evolving perception of masculinity—one that values tradition and elegance while allowing space for greater inclusivity and diversity in the future.

The study examines ads featuring male models from fashion brands such as Shingora, Burberry, Tommy Hilfiger, Koovs, Undercolours of Benetton, Sunil Mehra, Numerouno, Ahujasons, and Camla.

Advertisements for traditionally feminine products, such as shawls and scarves, blend traditional and modern elements when featuring male models. These portrayals often exude confidence and assertiveness. In one of Shingora's advertisements, the male model leans slightly towards the female model, symbolising a sense of control and protectiveness. His well-tailored suit enhances his elegance and professionalism, reflecting traditional masculine qualities. The ad's emphasis on body posture creates an intimate interaction that conveys both dominance and care, ultimately promoting gender diversity in fashion.

Similarly, a trench coat advertisement from luxury brand Burberry blends traditional and contemporary elements, redefining modern masculinity through high-fashion sophistication. The model's open trench coat, soft facial expressions, and androgynous aesthetic challenge conventional gender stereotypes. His relaxed posture, with one hand running through his hair, conveys self-assurance and a modern take on masculinity.

Modern masculinity is also highlighted in Tommy Hilfiger's beachwear ad, where male models are depicted with athletic, toned bodies, reinforcing ideals of physical strength and fitness. Their joyful interactions and camaraderie with female models suggest that masculinity today includes social connection and emotional expression. While the ad promotes fitness and an active lifestyle, it also fosters a positive body image, encouraging men to embrace well-being and self-expression.

The concept of contemporary masculinity is further explored in advertisements from Koovs and Undercolours of Benetton, which present a more approachable and relaxed version of masculinity. These ads avoid hyper-masculine traits like dominance and aggression, instead emphasising confidence, style, and authenticity.

Sunil Mehra's suit and tuxedo ad highlights diversity in men's fashion, featuring two male models in different suits that project elegance, style, confidence, and self-expression. The use of boxing gloves as a prop adds an interesting dynamic, challenging traditional masculinity by blending strength and power with sophistication. While boxing gloves traditionally symbolise aggression and dominance, incorporating them into a high-fashion context weakens their association with hyper-masculinity, promoting a more balanced representation of strength and refinement.

One of the most frequently featured brands in men's fashion advertising is Camla. Their ads present modern masculinity through depictions of stylish, confident men who exhibit a sense of protection towards female models rather than reinforcing hyper-masculine ideals. These ads also promote body positivity by featuring fit models without suggesting that extreme muscularity is a prerequisite for masculinity.

Another Camla advertisement portrays contemporary masculinity through a well-tailored suit, emphasising sophistication and elegance. The male model's facial expression conveys confidence and composure, reflecting the image of a modern man with inner assurance. The presence of a female model standing beside him with her hand on his shoulder suggests an equal partnership, reinforcing the idea of mutual support rather than traditional gender hierarchies. The ad subtly challenges stereotypes by incorporating fashion and grooming into masculinity, breaking away from the notion that men must always exude ruggedness and stoicism.

In a menswear advertisement from Cadini, masculinity is depicted as polished, confident, and sophisticated. The groom, dressed in a light grey suit, represents modern masculinity's embrace of refined fashion and elegance. Rather than promoting dominance or aggression, the ad focuses on body language that conveys positive masculinity. The groom walks arm-in-arm with his bride, contrasting the traditionally aggressive or dominant postures often associated with hyper-masculinity.

Fragrances and perfumes

Fragrance and cologne advertisements from brands such as Mont Blanc, Paco Rabanne, Giorgio Armani, Gianni Versace, 212, Eden, Hugo Boss, and Moschino often lean into traditional portrayals of masculinity. Two Mont Blanc ads, for instance, emphasise hyper-masculinity by featuring male models with sleek jawlines, exuding confidence, power, and determination. These images reinforce the idea that masculinity is tied to success, charm, and an aspirational lifestyle.

This emphasis on hyper-masculinity is apparent in other perfume ads as well. Paco Rabanne's advertisements present masculinity through strength, dominance, and confidence. In one ad, the male model wears a black leather jacket, symbolising toughness and rebellion, while the female model, dressed in a black leather jumpsuit, appears more relaxed. Her styling enhances her femininity while complementing the strong and protective aura of the man beside her. Rather than challenging stereotypes, the ad reinforces traditional ideas about gender roles, body image,

and luxury, portraying masculinity and femininity through an idealised lens.

Another Paco Rabanne ad takes this further, featuring a muscular, tattooed male model holding a trophy on his shoulder—an unmistakable symbol of success, strength, and victory. The message is clear: masculinity is about winning. In yet another ad, a shirtless man with war paint on his face embodies primal masculine energy. The ad's focus on raw physicality aligns perfectly with a male fragrance campaign. However, a noticeable contrast appears when a women's perfume is placed alongside it, represented by a female model, subtly reinforcing traditional gender expectations.

Not all fragrance ads lean into these conventions. A Giorgio Armani ad, for example, takes a slightly different approach by featuring a male model with a warm, genuine smile. This small detail challenges the idea that men should always appear emotionally reserved or stoic. Instead, it encourages men to embrace positive emotions and moments of happiness. The ad also promotes self-care, suggesting that grooming and personal well-being are not exclusive to women, subtly pushing back against outdated stereotypes.

Gianni Versace's ad, on the other hand, evokes a more classic image of masculinity. It features a young man on a motorcycle, wearing a leather jacket and exuding effortless confidence—a look that has symbolised youthful rebellion since the post-World War II era. The ad's composition reinforces hyper-masculinity, with the clean-shaven model in a dominant pose occupying most of the space. In the background, a woman in a short dress is surrounded by three men in black suits, looking towards the main model. The visual elements reinforce a familiar stereotype: the confident, independent man as the centre of attention, with women drawn to him and other men acknowledging his presence.

Another Versace ad continues this theme, featuring men in black suits projecting dominance and authority—hallmarks of traditional masculinity. However, the positioning of the men around a woman also suggests protection and care. They stand tall with confidence, their identical attire symbolising uniformity, collective strength, and masculine power. While visually striking, the ad does little to promote diversity. Instead, it reinforces hyper-masculine traits such as dominance, control, and emotional stoicism. It also idealises physical appearance, adhering to rigid beauty standards while overlooking natural imperfections.

In contrast, a 212 ad presents a more modern take on masculinity. It highlights confidence and fashion-consciousness while still nodding to traditional ideas of social status and allure. The male model, positioned between two women, is portrayed as charming and self-assured, reinforcing the idea that modern masculinity involves social dominance. The tagline below reads that the man "owns the party," once again placing him at the centre of attention. However, the ad does make an effort to promote diversity by featuring men of different backgrounds and body types, encouraging a broader and more inclusive view of masculinity. It also acknowledges that men can engage with fashion and beauty, promoting self-expression and personal style.

Another Giorgio Armani ad presents a highly polished vision of masculinity, focusing on physical attractiveness, confidence, and sensuality. The male model's strong, fit physique conveys power and sophistication—qualities associated with traditional masculinity. As a luxury brand,

Giorgio Armani reinforces the connection between success and elegance. However, the ad adheres strictly to Western beauty standards, featuring a single male model with sharp, defined features, leaving no room for cultural or gender diversity. While visually striking, it ultimately reinforces rather than challenges traditional notions of masculinity by placing heavy emphasis on physical appearance.

A Hugo Boss ad takes a similar approach, portraying masculinity through a rugged, confident male figure who aligns with Western ideals of strength and self-assurance. The ad does not attempt to promote diversity or challenge hyper-masculine stereotypes but instead upholds traditional masculine traits.

In general, fragrance ads tend to follow familiar patterns, often associating masculinity with strength, power, success, and physical appeal. While some brands make subtle efforts to modernise their portrayals—by incorporating positive emotions, self-care, and fashion awareness—many still lean heavily on traditional, and sometimes exaggerated, masculine ideals. The recurring focus on physical perfection and dominance suggests that the industry still has room to evolve in its representation of masculinity.

Fashion Accessories

In Furla's advertisements, masculinity is portrayed through a strong, confident demeanour and a stylish appearance, complemented by a warm and engaging expression. The male model radiates positivity, ease, and self-assurance as he puts on a sleek pair of sunglasses, his face lit up by a bright, genuine smile. High-end fashion and style are often stereotyped as feminine traits, but the ad challenges this perception by showcasing a man who fully embraces fashion. His positioning alongside the women in the ad suggests support and joy rather than dominance, subtly breaking the stereotype that men must always be in control.

The Specs n Shades advertisement highlights the model's flawlessly smooth, clean-shaven face, subtly suggesting that grooming and self-care align with modern masculinity. The ad challenges the traditional notion that masculinity is defined by dominance, seriousness, or ruggedness. Instead, it presents a more refined and elegant version of masculinity, showing that men can take pride in their appearance without compromising their masculinity.

An Adamantino jewellery ad also pushes against gender stereotypes by featuring a man wearing a diamond, implying that masculinity encompasses a broad range of interests and expressions—including those traditionally seen as less masculine. The ad promotes the idea that modern masculinity includes being fashion-forward and open to contemporary trends. However, while the male model is portrayed with a fit and toned physique, there is a noticeable lack of body diversity, reinforcing conventional beauty standards.

Modern masculinity in advertising is increasingly moving away from outdated notions of male dominance and hyper-masculinity. Ads are beginning to highlight emotional connections, challenge traditional gender roles, and promote more diverse and inclusive representations of relationships and identities. Greater efforts are also being made to feature models from a wider range of ethnic backgrounds.

A good example of this shift can be seen in OH SABYA's accessories advertisements, which take a modern approach to masculinity by featuring a man confidently carrying a sling bag—an accessory typically marketed towards women.

This visual choice directly challenges gender norms, showing that men can embrace styles and accessories traditionally associated with femininity without diminishing their masculinity. The ad conveys a message of self-assurance, breaking the rigid boundaries of fashion and gender expectations.

Beauty products

Products advertised in this category include shampoo, conditioner, cosmetics, and lipstick. A TRESemmé ad features a female model, emphasising both her strong personality and her beautiful, healthy hair. The ad breaks traditional male stereotypes by featuring a man as a hairdresser or stylist in the background. Hairdressing has long been associated with women, reinforcing the idea that hair care and styling are primarily feminine pursuits. However, the presence of a male stylist, confidently and skilfully working with a warm smile, challenges this gendered perception. The depiction of the male model conveys sophistication and elegance rather than aggression or dominance, moving away from hyper-masculine ideals.

L'Oréal's cosmetics ad presents the man in a supportive role, focusing on women's empowerment while including him in the narrative. The ad introduces a different perspective on modern masculinity, as the woman applies lipstick to the man's lips—directly challenging the stereotype that makeup is exclusively for women. The male model is dressed in a stylish suit, reinforcing the idea that modern masculinity embraces high fashion and beauty. This representation broadens the perception of masculinity, showing that men can be stylish, expressive, and engaged in beauty trends without compromising their identity. The male figure is portrayed as gentle and attentive, challenging the notion that men must be detached from personal grooming. The ad conveys a sense of equal partnership and mutual understanding between the genders, promoting a more inclusive and progressive view of masculinity.

Discussions

This study provides valuable insights into the evolving portrayal of masculinity in print advertisements in Vogue magazine. The research aimed to assess how masculinity has been represented over time, determine whether there has been a shift in traditional gender portrayals, and explore the extent of inclusivity and diversity in these depictions. This section evaluates the findings in relation to these objectives and situates them within broader cultural and theoretical frameworks.

1. Diversity and Representation

Between 2015 and 2023, the representation of masculinity in Vogue advertisements has undergone a noticeable transformation. In the earlier years of this period, male models predominantly fit a narrow ideal: young, white, and athletic. This created a rigid beauty standard that reinforced Eurocentric ideals while largely excluding racial and body diversity.

However, from 2019 onwards, there has been a shift towards greater inclusivity. Advertisements increasingly feature men of different ethnicities, ages, and body types. This reflects a wider societal movement towards recognising and valuing diverse identities. The increasing visibility of a broader range of male representations challenges earlier exclusions and signals an attempt to redefine conventional masculinity within mainstream fashion media.

2. Body Positivity

From 2015 to 2018, advertisements targeting male audiences primarily showcased a singular ideal of physical attractiveness: lean, muscular, and highly stylised. This narrow portrayal paralleled the unrealistic beauty standards historically imposed on women, contributing to a culture where men were expected to conform to a restrictive and often unattainable physique. Such representations reinforced the idea that masculinity is inherently tied to physical strength and sculpted perfection, marginalising those who did not fit this mould.

Recent years, however, have seen a shift towards body positivity in men's advertising. While muscular physiques remain prevalent, there has been a more conscious effort to include diverse body types, promoting a broader and more inclusive definition of male beauty. This change reflects an increasing recognition that masculinity should not be confined to a singular aesthetic ideal but should instead encompass a variety of expressions.

3. Hyper-Masculinity

The earlier years of the study (2015–2018) saw advertisements that heavily emphasised hyper-masculine traits—strength, aggression, and dominance. These portrayals reinforced a rigid notion of masculinity, prioritising toughness while minimising emotional expression or vulnerability. Such representations perpetuated restrictive gender norms, suggesting that men must conform to traditional ideals of power and resilience to be perceived as masculine.

However, from 2019 onwards, advertisements have increasingly depicted a more balanced and nuanced portrayal of masculinity. Rather than solely emphasising dominance, newer campaigns highlight emotional depth, vulnerability, and relational engagement. By showcasing men in roles that prioritise care, introspection, and emotional expression, these ads contribute to a broader cultural shift that challenges traditional gender binaries. The evolving portrayal of masculinity suggests an effort to redefine male identity beyond rigid norms, allowing for greater emotional and personal complexity.

4. Breaking Stereotypes

Between 2015 and 2018, the majority of advertisements reinforced traditional masculine roles and aesthetics, rarely deviating from established norms. Men were consistently depicted in dominant positions, adhering to conventional expectations of strength, success, and control. There was little effort to challenge or subvert societal perceptions of masculinity, as these representations largely conformed to long-standing stereotypes.

From 2019 onwards, however, there has been a deliberate move towards redefining masculinity by introducing more diverse narratives. Advertisements have started portraying men in roles that challenge traditional expectations, such as stay-at-home fathers, fashion-conscious individuals, and those engaged in self-care. This shift suggests an increasing recognition that masculinity is multifaceted and not confined to rigid archetypes. By breaking these stereotypes, advertisements contribute to a broader cultural discourse that seeks to expand the boundaries of what it means to be a man in contemporary society.

Key Shifts in Masculine Representation (2015–2023)

Several overarching trends emerge when analysing the portrayal of masculinity in Vogue advertisements over the study period:

Inclusivity – The increasing representation of men from diverse ethnic, racial, and body backgrounds signifies a move towards greater inclusivity. This shift aligns with broader societal efforts to challenge historical exclusions and promote a more representative media landscape.

Body Acceptance – The gradual incorporation of body positivity into men's advertising marks an important cultural development. By showcasing a wider range of body types, Vogue has contributed to the deconstruction of rigid beauty standards and fostered a more inclusive definition of masculinity.

Complex Masculinity – Masculinity is no longer depicted as a monolithic ideal. Instead, advertisements increasingly present men in varied emotional and relational contexts, acknowledging vulnerability, sensitivity, and self-expression as valid aspects of male identity.

Progressive Narratives – There has been a clear shift towards advertisements that actively challenge traditional gender roles. By positioning men in non-traditional and fluid roles, these ads reflect changing societal attitudes towards gender and identity.

Theoretical Implications

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity provides a useful framework for understanding these changes. Gender is not an innate characteristic but rather a performance shaped by repeated actions, social expectations, and cultural norms (Butler, 1998) ^[3]. Masculinity, in this context, operates as a constructed identity that is continuously reinforced and reshaped through representation in media. This ongoing process highlights the fluidity of gender roles and challenges traditional notions of masculinity, prompting a reevaluation of how these identities are expressed and perceived in contemporary society.

As Butler argues, gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1998, p. 519) ^[3]. The traditional portrayal of masculinity in advertisements relied on the repeated reinforcement of hyper-masculine traits, thereby upholding rigid gender norms. This reliance on hyper-masculine imagery not only perpetuated stereotypes but also marginalized alternative expressions of masculinity, leading to a narrow understanding of what it means to be male in contemporary society. However, the increasing representation of alternative masculinities disrupts these performances, demonstrating that masculinity is fluid and subject to change.

Additionally, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1958) ^[8] perspective on the body as a "set of possibilities" underscores the role of advertisements in shaping cultural understandings of gendered bodies. The historical dominance of a singular male body type in advertising illustrates how masculinity has been narrowly constructed. However, the diversification of body types and representations in recent years suggests an expansion of these possibilities, allowing for a broader spectrum of masculinity to emerge.

While traditional portrayals of hyper-masculinity persist, they are increasingly balanced by more progressive and varied representations. This shift suggests that the fashion industry is gradually moving towards a more reflective and inclusive portrayal of masculinity. By presenting men in ways that challenge outdated norms and embrace diversity, advertisements contribute to a broader societal conversation about gender identity and expression.

The persistence of traditional masculine tropes—strength, dominance, stoicism—indicates that gender norms remain deeply ingrained. However, their gradual decline in advertisements suggests an ongoing deconstruction of these rigid ideals. Given the cultural influence of advertisements, these shifts may not only reflect changing perceptions of masculinity but also play an active role in reshaping them.

As stereotypical portrayals diminish, the range of acceptable masculine expressions expands. Advertisements that showcase men expressing vulnerability, engaging in caregiving roles, or embracing non-traditional aesthetics highlight the fluidity of masculinity. This aligns with Butler's argument that gender is not a fixed identity but a performative construct that can be reshaped through repeated and varied expressions.

Conclusion

The representation of masculinity in *Vogue* advertisements from 2015 to 2023 reflects a broader cultural shift towards inclusivity, diversity, and the deconstruction of traditional gender norms. While hyper-masculine ideals continue to appear, they are increasingly accompanied by alternative portrayals that embrace emotional depth, body positivity, and progressive gender roles. The evolving depiction of masculinity signals a redefinition of male identity in contemporary media, reinforcing the idea that masculinity is not a singular, fixed concept but a dynamic and evolving performance.

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